JEFF LEMIRE DUSTIN NGUYEN

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I

KNOSSOS.
Formerly the smallest core planet of the United Galactic Council.
NOW...
FWASH
SKREEEE

SKREEEEE
MOTHER! WE WERE NOT EXPECTING YOU!
WHAT THOBIN MEANS TO S-S-SAY IS THAT IT IS G-G-GOOD T-T-TO SEE YOU, MOTHER.
HAVE MY SHIP FED. IT HAS BEEN A LONG FLIGHT.
YOU HEARD HER, VAMPS! FEED THE SHIP!
YES, MASTER FROBIN.

AS YOU CAN SEE, MOTHER, THE STARSHIP FIELDS ARE FLOURISHING. YOU WERE RIGHT, OF COURSE, THE **KNOSSIANS** MAKE WONDERFUL **SLAVES.**
A F-FRESH CR--CR-CROP OF SHIPS SHOULD BE R--READY FOR HARVEST BY THE NEXT M-MOON.
EXCELLENT. AND THE OFFENSIVE ON NIYRATA, **GENERAL VIX?** ANY PROGRESS THERE?
IT WENT WELL, MOTHER. WE SNUFFED OUT THE BLACK MARKET THERE AND CONFISCATED AND DESTROYED A LARGE NUMBER OF SPACECRAFT, WEAPONS AND FORBIDDEN TECH.

AND WHAT ABOUT THE ATTACKS ON OUR BASES ON THE MOON OF AMUN, GENERAL? WHAT OF *THAT?*
THE UGC REBELS HIT US HARD, BUT WE ***TOOK A PRISONER.***
A PRISONER?
I WILL SEE THIS PRISONER. ***NOW.***
IT IS ALL UNDER CONTROL, MOTHER. IT'S ONLY A MATTER OF TIME UNTIL HE TALKS TO US!
YOU BUMBLING IDIOTS HAVE **NO IDEA** WHAT YOU'RE DOING. **I** WILL SEE THE PRISONER.
"B-BUT, W-WE HAVE EVERYTHING UNDER C-CONTROL, MOMMY." I SWEAR!
SHUT UP, FROBIN! YOU'VE GOTTEN NOWHERE WITH THE PRISONER! ***NOWHERE!***
OH?! AND W-WHAT HAVE YOU MANAGED TO D-DO, ***GREAT WIZARD*** THOBIN?!
QUIET! BOTH OF YOU!
M-MOTHER, PLEASE!
NO! ***THE COVEN*** WARNED ME AGAINST TRUSTING YOU TWO WITH SUCH AN IMPORTANT MISSION, BUT I WAS BLINDED BY A MOTHER'S LOVE. ***NO MORE!***
GO BACK TO ORDERING AROUND SLAVES AND GROWING SPACECRAFT... THAT'S ALL YOU TWO ARE GOOD FOR.
--UNGH!

HOW LONG AGO DID YOU TAKE THIS PRISONER?
TWO DAYS. THE OTHER UGC REBELS ESCAPED AGAIN, OF COURSE, BUT THEY LEFT HIS BODY BEHIND.
FOOLS. THEY THOUGHT DEATH COULD SILENCE HIM. BUT DEATH IS OUR ALLY, NOT THEIRS.

M-MOTHER, I TRIED ALL OF THE NECROMANTIC SPELLS IN THE OLD TEXTS. I'M AFRAID WE WERE JUST TOO LATE.
TOO LATE?
PERHAPS FOR YOU FOOLS. BUT NOT FOR ME. WATCH, BOYS. I WILL SHOW YOU **TRUE MAGIC.**
GASP!

C--COLD. DARK!
DO NOT BE SCARED. MOTHER IS HERE. TELL ME... WHAT WAS YOUR NAME?
2ND LIEUTENANT RIMUS TELL. 4TH BATTALION, UNITED GALACTIC COUNCIL SAMPSON.
THE UGC IS DEAD. LONG GONE. YOU REMEMBER THAT, YES?
YES. LONG GONE. NO MORE UGC. JUST YOU. JUST MOTHER.
BUT IT IS **NOT** JUST ME. THERE IS **ANOTHER,** ISN'T THERE? **SOMEONE** IS HELPING WHAT'S LEFT OF YOU UGC REBELS.
YES... ANOTHER. HELPING. PROTECTING. PROTECTING US WITH **GREAT MAGIC.**
THERE IS NO MAGIC IN THIS GALAXY THAT ***I*** DO NOT OVERSEE. NO POWER ***I*** DO NOT CONTROL. I AM MOTHER AND THE UNIVERSE ***IS MINE.***
NOW ***TELL ME,*** WHO IS PROTECTING THE REBELS?

WE DO NOT KNOW HIS NAME.
LIAR! DO NOT THINK THAT DEATH MAKES YOU IMMUNE TO PAIN! I WILL TORTURE YOU FOR ETERNITY IF I MUST. TELL ME WHO HE IS!
...
WE DO NOT KNOW HIS NAME. ONLY HIS LIGHT.
WHO IS HE?! WHO IS THE ONE PROTECTING YOU? TELL ME!
WHO IS HE?!
--GGK!
HE IS THE LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS. HE IS THE GREAT WIZARD. HE IS HOPE.

FLOOSH
WHA--?!
MOTHER?!
MOTHER, DID YOU--?
NO.
SOMETHING THERE. WHAT IS IT?
...IT IS A MESSAGE.

ASCENDER

SAMPSON.
Formerly the largest planet in the United Galactic Council and home to its military center and largest human cities.
Now it is a devastated world thrown back into the pre-technological age and cut off from the rest of the galaxy.

MOTHER IS GREAT.
MOTHER LOVES YOU.
MOTHER IS ALWAYS WATCHING.

HELLO, TRILLY.
WHAT DO YOU WANT **NOW,** GIRLIE?
WHAT DO YOU THINK I WANT? I WANNA TRADE.
HUMPH! I'M DONE TRADING GOOD FRUIT TO YOU FOR MOUNTAIN RATS. I'M A KIND MAN, GIRLIE, BUT THAT ONLY GOES SO FAR.
AIN'T MOUNTAIN RAT THIS TIME, TRILLY. FROX FUR.
FROX?! HOW'D ***YOU*** TRAP A FROX?
I TRAP ***ALL KINDS*** OF THINGS UP THERE, TRILLY. FROX AIN'T THAT TOUGH.
HUMPH! WELL, I CAN'T TRADE THESE EASILY. SELECT MARKET FOR FROX THESE DAYS. I CAN ONLY GIVE YOU ***TWO PIECES*** OF FRUIT.
TWO?! FORGET IT!

WHAT DO WE HAVE HERE?
LOOKS LIKE MOUNTAIN SCUM TO ME. YOU TRADING ILLEGALLY AGAIN, TRILLY?
NO, SIR! I--I TOLD HER, I SAYS, TRILLY DON'T TAKE BLACK MARKET DEALS. TRILLY ONLY TRADES WITH LICENSED VENDORS!
SO, YOU GOT A LICENSE, GIRL?
Y--YES.
YOU LYING TO US?
NO, SIR.
LEMME SEE YOUR MARK THEN.
HAH! YOU AIN'T FREE. YOU AIN'T **SAVED**, AND YOU AIN'T EVEN LICENSED TO BE DOWN IN THE VILLAGE, KID!

SO?! EVERYONE COMES DOWN HERE! WHAT DO YOU CARE?
WHAT DID YOU SAY?! IS THAT HOW YOU TALK TO THE SAVED?!
--KKT-- NO--NO, SIR--
WHAT WAS THAT?
NO, OFFICER. PRAISE MOTHER. MOTHER SAVE US ALL.
YOU'RE LUCKY IT WAS US WHO FOUND YOU, KID. ANYONE ELSE IN THE MILITIA WOULD HAVE TURNED YOU OVER TO THE CAMPS.
BUT WE AIN'T HEARTLESS. MOTHER IS COMPASSIONATE.
SO YOU GIVE US THE FROX FUR AND GET ON BACK UP THE MOUNTAIN, AND WE'LL LET IT GO.
BUT WE SEE YOU TRYING TO TRADE DOWN HERE AGAIN, AND YOU'LL BE VAMP FOOD. YOU HEAR?
TH--THANK YOU, OFFICER. PRAISE MOTHER.
MOTHER IS GREAT.
MOTHER LOVES YOU.

"...MOTHER IS ALWAYS WATCHING."
UM, HI DAD.
...
WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN, MILA?
I-- NOWHERE. I WAS JUST PLAYING.
PLAYING? **ALL** AFTERNOON?
SORRY, I DIDN'T MEAN TO--
WHAT THE HELL IS THIS?!

YOUR RUNE IS SHOWING! YOU TELL ME WHAT HAPPENED RIGHT NOW!
I--I WENT DOWN TO SWAP TOWN. AND THE MILITIA STOPPED ME, BUT I'M FINE, DAD.
FINE?! MILA! WHAT WERE YOU THINKING?!
I WAS THINKING THAT I'M BORED OUT OF MY MIND UP HERE AND IF YOU'D JUST AGREE TO LET ME BECOME SAVED I COULD GO DOWN TO SWAP TOWN AND TO SCHOOL AND ANYWHERE ELSE I WANTED WITHOUT HAVING TO WORRY ABOUT BEING THROWN IN A VAMP CAMP!
...
YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE SAYING.
I DO TOO! WHO CARES IF I BELIEVE IN MOTHER OR NOT?! AT LEAST WE WOULDN'T HAVE TO LIVE UP HERE LIKE HERMITS ANYMORE!
I WILL NEVER... NEVER SUBMIT TO THAT--THAT MONSTER! YOU HEAR ME? WE ARE FREE. AND AS LONG AS I HAVE ANYTHING TO SAY ABOUT IT, WE'LL STAY FREE.

FREE?! LOOK WHERE BEING FREE GOT US! LOOK WHERE IT GOT MOM!
IF SHE WERE STILL ALIVE TO HEAR YOU TALK LIKE THAT--
MORE THAN ANYONE I EVER KNEW, YOUR MOM HATED THAT WOMAN AND EVERYTHING SHE STOOD FOR.
AND SHE--
SHE GAVE HER LIFE SO YOU COULD GROW UP FREE.

IS THAT WHAT YOU THINK WE ARE UP HERE?! FREE?! I HAVE NEVER EVEN LEFT THIS WARD! I'VE NEVER SEEN THE OCEANS OR THE OLD CITIES! ***NOTHING!***
MILA, SIT DOWN AND EAT!
I'M NOT HUNGRY.
MILA!
MILA!

MATA.
SKREEEEE
Formerly an aquatic world free of sentient life and secret home to a hidden underwater robot colony.
Now home to Mother's Floating Stronghold and sanctum to her coven.
GENERAL VIX, FETCH *THE KNIFE.*
YES, MOTHER.

HERE YOU GO, MOTHER.
SHAAAAAA

DAUGHTER.
DAUGHTER.
DAUGHTER.
DAUGHTER.
WHAT DO YOU WANT, BITCH?
MOTHERS, I SUMMON YOU.
I REQUEST YOUR COUNCIL, MOTHERS.
WHY SHOULD WE HELP YOU?

OH, BE QUIET! YOUR BITTERNESS GROWS TIRESOME. WE ARE A LINEAGE. SHE IS OUR ANCESTOR. ONE DAY SHE WILL DIE AND JOIN THE COVEN TOO. IT IS THE WAY OF THINGS.
EASY FOR YOU ALL TO SAY. YOU HAVE BEEN DEAD FOR AGES, ONLY YEARS AGO I WAS STILL FLESH AND BLOOD! I WAS ALIVE! IT SHOULD HAVE BEEN ME WHO ROSE UP! ME WHO RULED THE UNIVERSE, NOT THIS WHELP!
YOU WERE TOO WEAK, MOTHER. THAT IS WHY I KILLED YOU IN YOUR SLEEP. NOW YOUR MAGIC AND YOUR WISDOM BELONG TO ME.
IGNORE HER, DAUGHTER.
OUR WISDOM IS YOURS. WHAT TROUBLES YOU?
A MAGE HAS RISEN. HE HAS ALLIED WITH MY ENEMIES. YET, NO MATTER WHAT SPELL I CAST I CANNOT DETECT OR LOCATE HIS MAGIC ANYWHERE.
HE IS HIDDEN FROM ME IN EVERY WAY. HOW IS THIS POSSIBLE?
WE SENSE NO MAGE.
YOUR MAGIC IS OUR MAGIC, AND IT IS STILL THE GREATEST IN THE GALAXY.

BUT THIS-- THIS WAS A MESSAGE FROM THE UNKNOWN MAGE. WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?
THE ROBOTS ARE GONE. THEY ARE NO CONCERN. YOU'VE STOMPED OUT ALL TECHNOLOGY IN THE GALAXY EXCEPT THAT WHICH YOU STRICTLY CONTROL.
THIS IS NO MESSAGE, IT IS A DISTRACTION, A RUSE. THIS MAGE TOYS WITH YOU. YOU ARE IN CONTROL NOW, DAUGHTER. THERE IS **NOTHING TO FEAR.**
HMM...I WOULD NOT BE SO SURE ABOUT THAT.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN, MOTHER?
AS THE LAST TO JOIN THE COVEN, MY CONNECTION TO THE MATERIAL WORLD IS THE STRONGEST AND I--I HAVE SEEN **SOMETHING** IN THE DARKNESS.
WHAT?! WHAT HAVE YOU SEEN? ***TELL ME!***
A **HOUND.** I HAVE SEEN A HOUND.
...BEWARE THE **HOUND WITH A BACKWARDS TONGUE.**

BEWARE THE HOUND.
BEWARE THE HOUND.
BEWARE THE HOUND.
BEWARE THE HOUND.
BEWARE THE HOUND.
SHAAAAA
WHAT DOES IT MEAN, MOTHER?
I DO NOT KNOW YET, VIX. BUT I **WILL.**
WE ARE GOING TO GNISH. I WILL SPEAK WITH **THE KING.**
OF COURSE, MOTHER.
THE HOUND WITH THE BACKWARDS TONGUE...

There has to be more than this.
There just has to be.
Why couldn't I have been born when we still had spaceships and shiftdrives?
THOOOM
Why couldn't I have been before the Harvesters took it all away and before Mother was born?

FWOOSH
What would it have been like to be alive when robots walked amongst us?
My dad won't ever talk about what things were really like back then. And I have no one else to ask.
So every night I look to the stars and I ask myself these things over and over again.
I never thought I would actually get an answer...

...I was wrong.
FRA! FRA!
!!!

SAMPSON.
SHHH! BE QUIET!
FRA! FRA! FRA!
SOMEONE WILL HEAR YOU! YOU NEED TO STOP!
FRA! FRA! FRA!
MILA?
OH NO! THAT'S MY DAD! YOU GOTTA HIDE!
MILA?!
FRA!
NO! DON'T!

I am in so much trouble...
I am in so much trouble...
I am in so much--
--OH!
DAD?
--MY DOG, MILA... YOU **FOUND** MY DOG!
FRA! FRA!

THE PLANET GNISH.
Home of the only monarchy in the galaxy. Formerly home to the melting pits and the robot-hunting Scrappers.
ATTENTION! ATTENTION! WELCOME TO GNISH, MASTER OF SORCERERS! QUEEN OF THE ARCANE! RULER OF THE GALAXY AND MOTHER OF ALL!
OH, BE QUIET! WHERE IS THE KING?
AHEM--WELL, HEH, YOU SEE, HIS MAJESTY IS NOT FEELING PARTICULARLY WELL TODAY, MOTHER. HE ASKED THAT I, AS HIS CONSORT, RECEIVE YOU.
I WILL SEE THE KING. NOW.
:KKT: YES--M--MOTHER--

CHOOOM
CHOOOM
AHEM-- MY LORD, WE HAVE--UM, GUESTS.
I TOLD YOU, I AM TOO BUSY TO--
SHUT UP, BOY!
YOU CANNOT JUST BARGE INTO MY THRONE ROOM! I AM S'TOK, SON OF S'LOK! THERE IS PROTOCOL!
WHAT YOU ARE, BOY, IS A SNIVELLING LITTLE WHELP WHO IS LUCKY TO BE ALIVE.
THE ONLY REASON I LET YOU KEEP ON PLAYING KING, AND THE ONLY REASON I HAVEN'T RAZED THIS ENTIRE WORLD, IS BECAUSE GNISH HAS THE INFRASTRUCTURE I NEED TO COLLECT AND DESTROY WHAT TECH IS STILL LEFT OUT THERE.
DO YOU UNDERSTAND? YOU ARE KING OF THE GARBAGE MEN, BOY. NOTHING MORE.

BUT NOW I'M AFRAID YOU ARE OUTLIVING YOUR USEFULNESS.
B-BUT, MOTHER--THIS MONTH ALONE WE HAVE COLLECTED AND SCRAPPED NEARLY ***THREE HUNDRED*** SPACECRAFT IN THE MELTING PITS.
AND WHAT OF THE REBELS? THOSE FORMER UGC GRUNTS KEEP COMING. THEY KEEP FINDING WEAPONS AND SHIFTDRIVES.
WHY HAVEN'T YOU FOUND ***THEIR SUPPLY LINE*** YET?!
I HAVE MY ***BEST SCRAPPERS*** HUNTING FOR THEM. IT IS ONLY A MATTER OF TIME!
TIME? YOU ARE OUT OF TIME, CHILD. I NOW KNOW I CANNOT TRUST YOU. I LET YOU HAVE YOUR SOVEREIGNTY, BUT I SHOULD HAVE BEEN MORE CLOSELY INVOLVED IN YOUR OPERATIONS.
GENERAL VIX.
HERE YOU ARE, MOTHER.

YES, I THINK IT IS **TIME** I KEPT A MUCH CLOSER **EYE** ON YOU HERE, "KING" S'TOK.
WHAT IS **THAT?**
THIS?
THIS WILL BE **MY EYES** ON GNISH. MY EYES ON **YOU.**
SLURP-- SLURRRK--
WE WILL **STAY WITH YOU,** KING S'TOK...

EVERYWHERE YOU GO, EVERYTHING YOU DO...WE WILL BE WITH YOU, ALWAYS WATCHING. AND I SEE WHAT IT SEES.
THIS-- THIS IS AN OUTRAGE!
PLAYTIME IS OVER, BOY. FIND THE REBELS. SHUT THEM DOWN. OR GNISH FOLLOWS THE REST OF THE UGC INTO RUIN.
MOTHER WILL BE WATCHING.

SAMPSON.
WAIT... WHO IS TIM-21?
I TOLD YOU, MILA, TIM-21 WAS A COMPANION ROBOT THAT LIVED WITH ME WHEN I WAS ABOUT YOUR AGE. THIS WAS BACK BEFORE THE FALL, WHEN WE WERE IN THE MINING COLONY ON DIRISHU.
AND BANDIT WAS YOUR PET?! I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU NEVER TOLD ME YOU HAD A PET! A ROBOT PET AND A ROBOT BROTHER! AND YOU WON'T EVEN LET ME HAVE A FROX!
IT WAS A DIFFERENT TIME, MILA. EVERYONE HAD ROBOTS BEFORE THE HARVESTERS.
FRA!
I KNOW THAT. I MEAN, EVERYONE KNOWS THAT. BUT HEARING STORIES ABOUT IT AND ACTUALLY SEEING ONE IS...
FRA!
WOW... A REAL LIVE ROBOT. AMAZING.

KZZZKT
WHAT DID YOU--?!
FRA! FRA!
NOTHING! I DIDN'T DO ANYTHING, DAD!
A STAR CHART. BUT THIS--THIS *ISN'T OUR GALAXY.*

--CRRRK!
FRA!
DAD?! WHAT WAS THAT?!
I DON'T KNOW. STAY STILL.
FRA!
AND BE QUIET, BANDIT!
MOTHER SEES YOU.
MOTHER IS EVERY-WHERE.
SHIT!
THEY'RE HERE! THEY KNOW!
MOTHER WILL SAVE YOU.
MOTHER LOVES YOU.

DADDY?!
GET BACK, MILA!
OH NO...
FLANK THE CABIN. LOOK FOR A BACK ENTRANCE. I DON'T WANT THEM TO ESCAPE.
YES, CAPTAIN.
MILA, LISTEN TO ME--GET UNDER THE BED. NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS, STAY THERE. **DO NOT COME OUT.** DO YOU UNDERSTAND ME?
IT'S--IT'S ***A VAMP,*** ISN'T IT?
I'M SORRY, DADDY--I DIDN'T MEAN TO--
YOU DIDN'T DO ANYTHING WRONG, MILA. THIS IS NOT YOUR FAULT. BANDIT CAME FOR ME.

NOW GO, GET UNDER THE BED AND STAY THERE.
DAD, WHAT ARE YOU--
FRA!
JUST GO! GET DOWN.
WHAM
WE KNOW YOU HAVE FORBIDDEN TECH IN THERE! OUR ENCHANTMENTS ALERTED US! THERE IS NO POINT IN HIDING. COME OUT AND BE SPARED!
MOTHER BECKONS YOU.

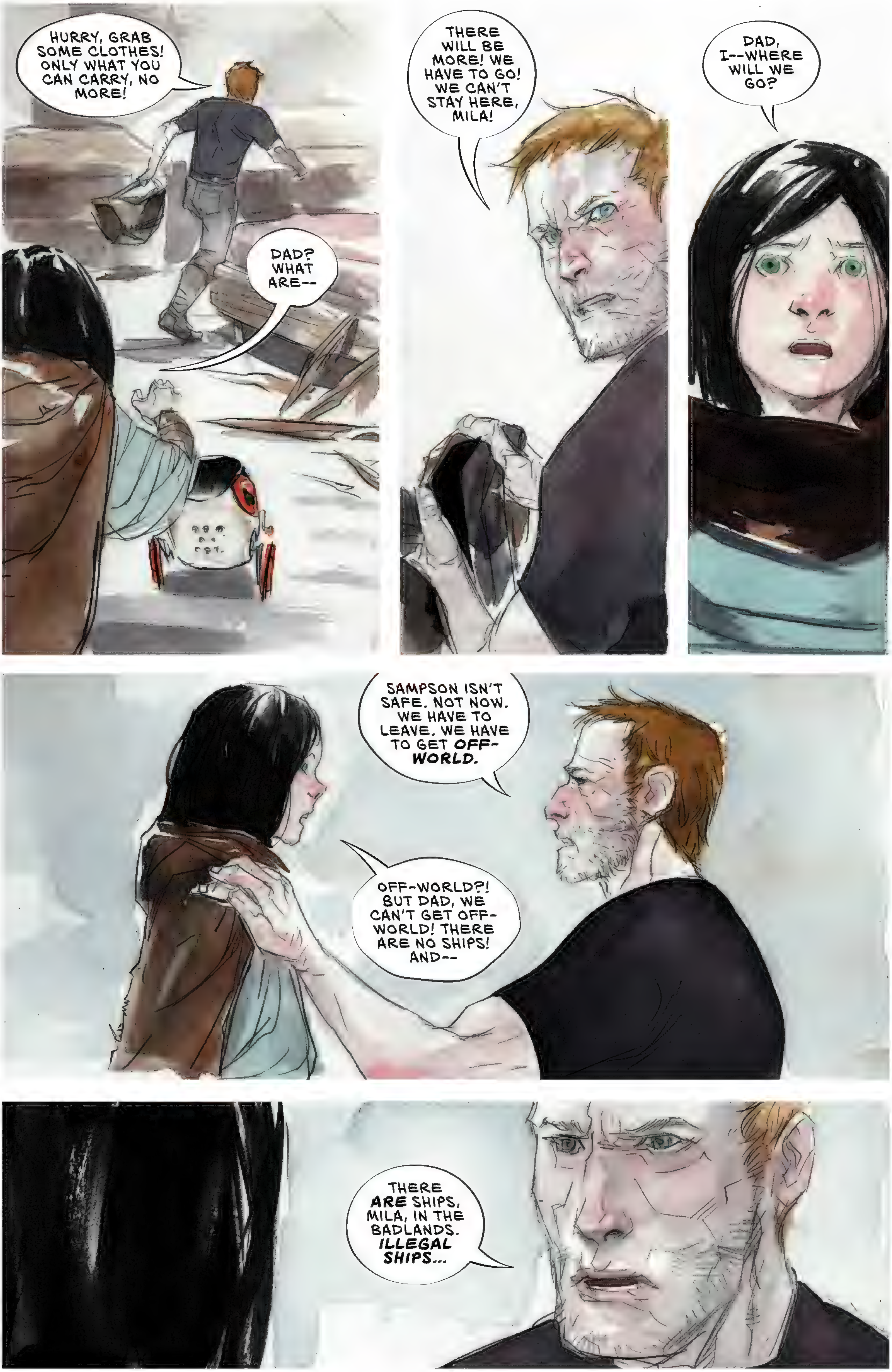
MOTHER WILL SAVE YOU.
YEAH YEAH...
I GOT YOUR **SALVATION** RIGHT HERE.
CHAK

CHOOM
YOU TWO! GO FOR REINFORCEMENTS! HURRY!
FIRE! THEY HAVE FIRE!
CHOOM
HSSSSSS!
GET AWAY FROM MY HOME!
CHOOM
FRA! FRA!

--ARGH!
CHOOM
WHUMP
SHIT!
CHOOM
HSSSSSS!

FRA!FRA!
WHAT HAVE WE HERE?
FRA! FRA!
CHOOM
MOTHER FORBIDS WEAPONS LIKE THESE. MOTHER FORBIDS ***THE ROBOT*** YOU HAVE HARBORED. THESE ARE OFFENSES PUNISHABLE BY DEATH...BUT DEATH IS TOO GOOD FOR YOU, MOUNTAIN RAT.
INSTEAD YOU WILL BE ***FOOD...*** MY ***PERSONAL FEEDER.***
--?!

DADDY?
ARE-- ARE YOU OKAY?
FRA! FRA!
I'M OKAY, MILA! YOU-- YOU DID GOOD.


HURRY, GRAB SOME CLOTHES! ONLY WHAT YOU CAN CARRY, NO MORE!
DAD? WHAT ARE--
THERE WILL BE MORE! WE HAVE TO GO! WE CAN'T STAY HERE, MILA!
DAD, I--WHERE WILL WE GO?
SAMPSON ISN'T SAFE. NOT NOW. WE HAVE TO LEAVE. WE HAVE TO GET **OFF-WORLD.**
OFF-WORLD?! BUT DAD, WE CAN'T GET OFF-WORLD! THERE ARE NO SHIPS! AND--
THERE **ARE** SHIPS, MILA, IN THE BADLANDS. ***ILLEGAL SHIPS...***

"IT WON'T BE EASY, BUT IF WE CAN MAKE IT TO THE PORTS...
"--I THINK I KNOW **SOMEONE** WHO MAY BE ABLE TO HELP US."

3

10 YEARS AGO.
HRRRACK
ANDY--!
THE-- THE UGC-- THE ENTIRE FLEET--IT'S GONE.
ANDY, GET US OUT OF HERE!
I CAN'T LEAVE TIM!
IT'S TOO LATE FOR THAT. DON'T YOU SEE? THEY HAVE HIM NOW. IT'S OVER...IT'S ALL OVER.
WE HAVE TO GET OUT OF HERE! WE HAVE TO JUMP!
JUMP?! JUMP WHERE?!
ANYWHERE, ANDY!

"--JUST GET US OUT OF HERE!"
SHRACK
WHERE--?
...DIRISHU-6.
WHERE I GREW UP. I--I BROUGHT US HOME.

EFF? YOU OKAY?
NO.
EFFIE?
NO. I DON'T--THERE'S NOTHING LEFT, ANDY. THE BETWEEN--THE UGC. AND I DON'T KNOW WHAT WE'RE GOING TO DO.
WE'RE STILL HERE, EFF. WE CAN LAY LOW, AND THEN FIND SOMEWHERE TO--
YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND...
...IT'S NOT **JUST US,** ANDY. NOT ANYMORE.

SAMPSON. NOW.
--BUT HOW WILL WE GET DOWN THE MOUNTAIN?!
THE FLYING GUARD WENT FOR REINFORCEMENTS, THEY'LL BE BACK AND WATCHING ALL THE TRAILS DOWN.
NOT ALL THE TRAILS, MILA. I KNOW A FEW. NOW, HURRY!
FRA!
QUIET, BANDIT! THERE IS NO WAY WE CAN LET YOU RUN FREE. YOU'RE GOING TO BE A MAGNET FOR ALL THEIR ANTI-TECH CHARMS AS IS.
FRA! FRA!
DAD, WILL-- WILL WE BE BACK? I MEAN, WE AREN'T GOING FOREVER ARE WE?
WE CAN NEVER COME BACK HERE. YOU KNOW THAT. WE NEED TO GET OFF-PLANET, MILA.

BUT HOW ARE WE GOING TO GET PAST THE MILITIA CAMP?
I DON'T KNOW YET, BUT I'LL THINK OF SOMETHING.
THINK OF SOMETHING?! THAT'S YOUR PLAN?
DO YOU HAVE A BETTER ONE?! WE COULD TURN BANDIT IN? PRAY THAT THE MILITIA HAS MERCY ON US?
OR WE COULD BECOME SAVED? IS THAT IT? BECOME ***DISCIPLES OF MOTHER?*** IS ***THAT*** WHAT YOU WANT?
...
NO.

I'M SORRY, SWEETHEART. I DIDN'T MEAN TO YELL. I KNOW YOU'RE SCARED. BUT YOU HAVE TO KNOW I WOULD NEVER LET THEM HURT YOU. WE'LL BE OKAY. I PROMISE YOU.
FRA! FRA!
WHAT IS *YOUR* PROBLEM?
DAD...DO YOU FEEL THAT? A--A RUMBLE?
SOMETHING IS COMING.

FRA!
FRA!
FROXES!
BUT-- WHAT ARE THEY RUNNING FROM?
THOOM
MILA...
THOOM
DADDY?!
OOM
OH SCRAP.

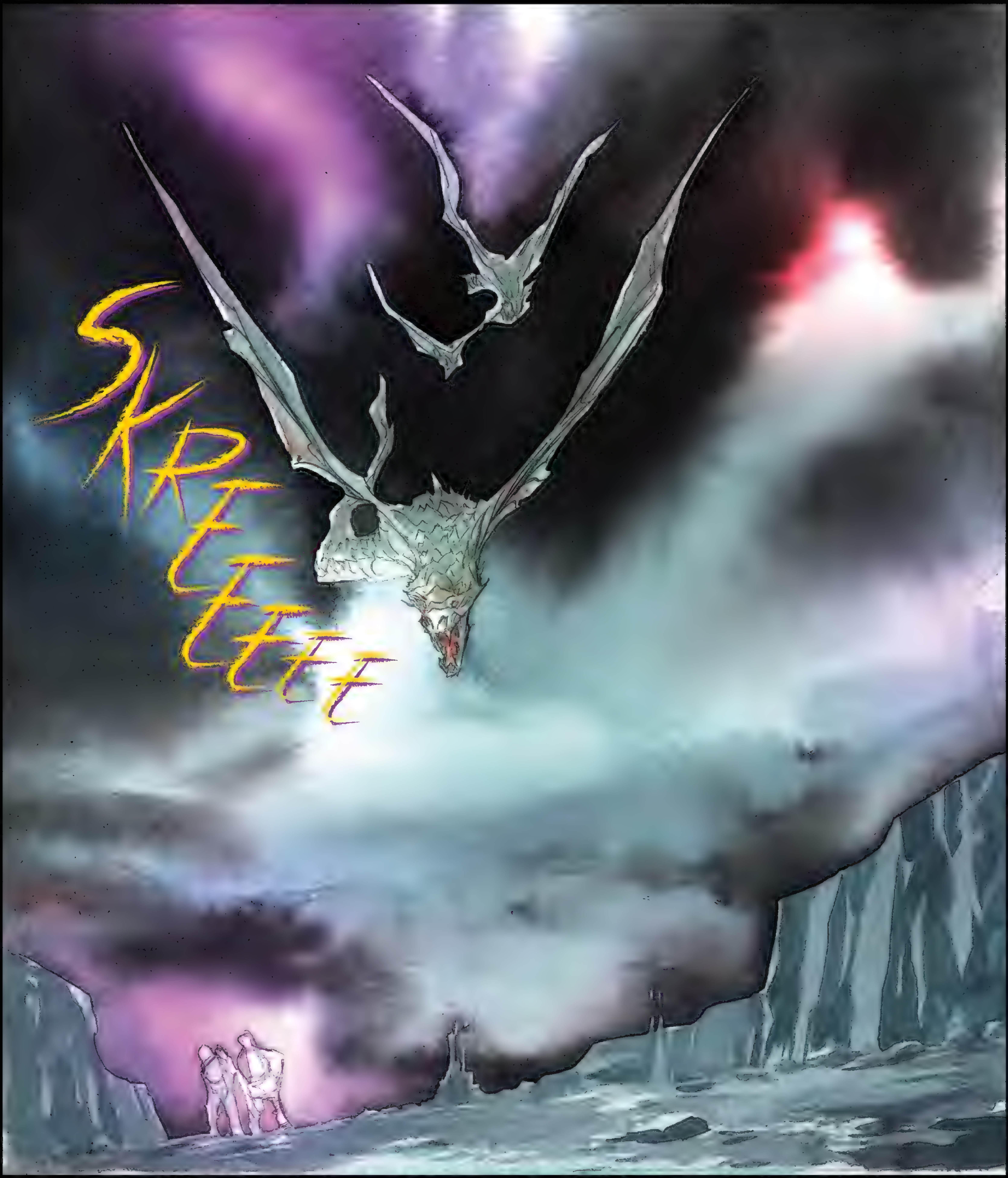
THOOM
FRA! FRA!
FRA! FRA!
DADDY!
RUN, MILA, RUN!

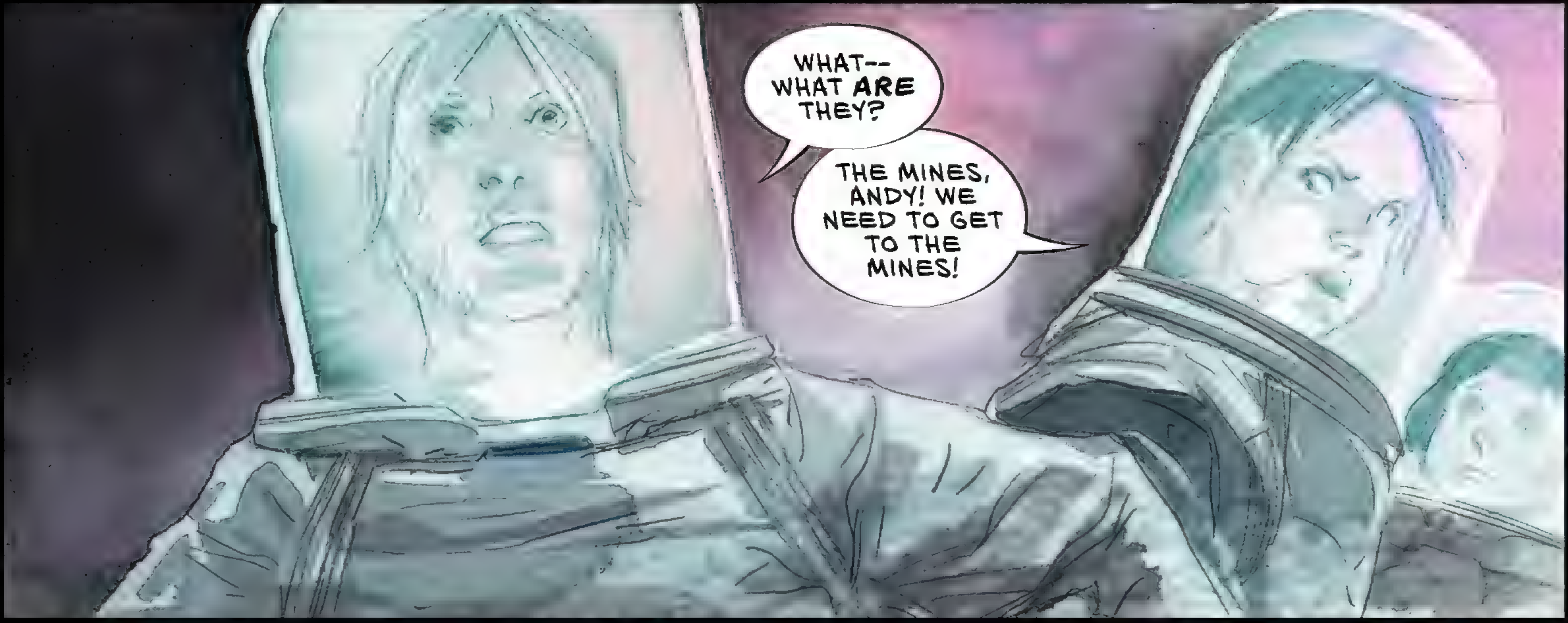
7 YEARS AGO.
HELLO? I'M BACK.
WE'RE IN HERE!
HEY.
HEY. ANY LUCK OUT THERE?
TWO MINE RATS. THEY'RE GETTING SCARCER. WE ARE GOING TO HAVE TO START RATIONING THE OLD COLONIST STOCKS EVEN MORE THAN WE ARE.
WHAT ABOUT TAKING ANOTHER SHIFTJUMP TO NIYRATA FOR SUPPLIES? MILA AND I WOULD BE OKAY HERE FOR A DAY OR TWO.

I DON'T THINK THAT'S A GOOD IDEA, EFF. I WENT AND BOOTED UP THE OLD COMMS ARRAY AGAIN. WE'VE LOST CONTACT WITH DIRISHU-4 NOW, AND THERE IS STILL NO SIGNAL FROM THE OTHER RIM PLANETOIDS.
WHAT DO YOU THINK'S HAPPENING?
I DON'T KNOW, BUT EVERY TIME I USE THE COMMS THERE ARE FEWER AND FEWER CONTACTS OUT THERE. AND THE LAST UGC REPORT WE GOT WAS OVER A YEAR AGO.
GAH.
I DON'T KNOW, ANDY. MAYBE YOU SHOULD TAKE A RUN ANYWAY. IT'S BEEN TOO QUIET. I'M STARTING TO WORRY.
WELL, DON'T. THE WORST THING THAT CAN HAPPEN OUT THERE ALREADY HAS. AND HERE WE ARE. LET THE UNIVERSE BURN. IT DOESN'T MATTER. WE GOT THIS MONKEY, WHAT ELSE DO WE NEED, *HUH?*

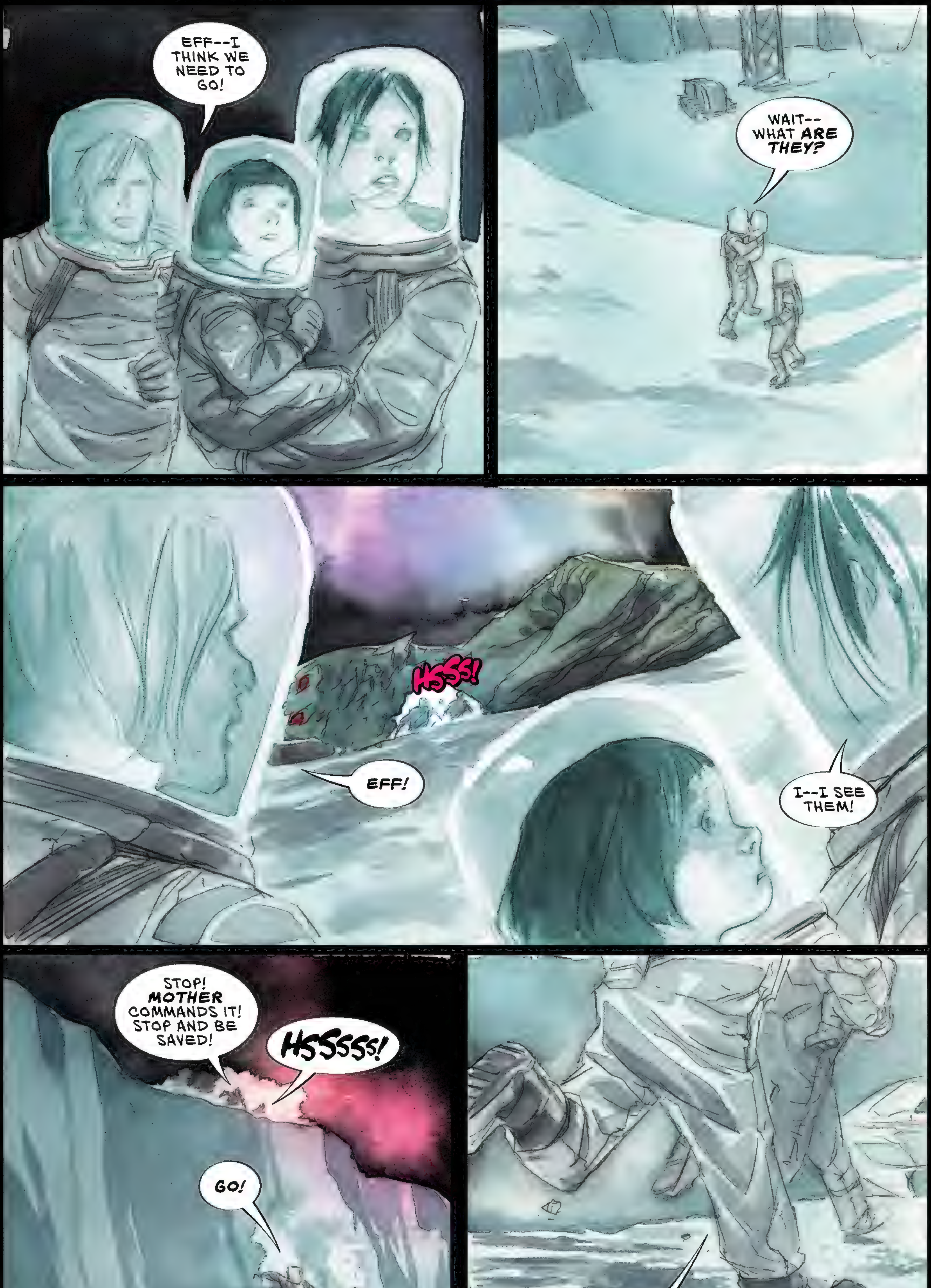
6 YEARS AGO.
HERE IT COMES!
MY BALL!
YEP. YOUR BALL, MILA. WANNA THROW IT BACK?
NICE TOSS!
CATCH, DADDY!
EFF? YOU OKAY?
I DON'T KNOW.
MOMMY, OKAY?
I'M OKAY, BABY.

WHAT IS IT?
I DON'T KNOW. MY SENSORS SORT OF BLIPPED ON SOMETHING UP THERE FOR A MINUTE.
DRAGON!
WHAT? A SHIP? THERE HASN'T BEEN ANOTHER SHIP ON RADAR FOR A MONTHS, EFF.
I DON'T KNOW. IT WAS-- WEIRD.
MOMMY! DADDY! DRAGON!
HEH. THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS DRAGONS, MILA.
WHAT THE--?!


SKREEEEE


WHAT-- WHAT **ARE** THEY?
THE MINES, ANDY! WE NEED TO GET TO THE MINES!

RUN!
DADDY!
FRA! FRA!
WE--WE'LL RUN RIGHT INTO THE MILITIA. THEY ARE FORCING US DOWN TO THEM.
THOOM
MILA, THE OLD TRAP LINE. THE ONE WE SET UP LAST SUMMER. CAN YOU FIND IT FROM HERE?
YES, BUT--
THOOM
BUT NOTHING. LISTEN TO ME. YOU TAKE BANDIT. HE'S A GOOD BOY. HE'LL HELP YOU. YOU GET TO THAT OLD TRAP LINE AND FOLLOW IT DOWN PAST THE VILLAGES. HEAD TO THE SHORE. THE PORTS.
NO! NOT WITHOUT YOU!
THOOM
LISTEN! I WILL MEET YOU AT THE PORTS. WHEN YOU GET THERE, YOU NEED TO FIND A WOMAN CALLED TELSA. CAN YOU REMEMBER THAT? TELSA. SAY IT.
T-TELSA. I NEED TO FIND TELSA.
THOOM
THAT'S MY GIRL. NOW GO!
THOOM


EFF--I THINK WE NEED TO GO!
WAIT-- WHAT **ARE THEY?**
HSSS!
EFF!
I--I SEE THEM!
STOP! **MOTHER** COMMANDS IT! STOP AND BE SAVED!
HSSSSS!
GO!
THE SHIP! GET TO THE SHIP!

HSSSSS!
--UNGH!
MOMMY!
EFF!
HSSSSS!
GET OFF!
EFFIE!
GO, ANDY! GO!
CHOOM CHOOM
GET OFF OF HER!

HEH HEH... MOTHER DOES NOT LIKE BAD BOYS THAT USE TOYS.
HSSSSS!
GAH!
EFFIE!

ANDY--
--GRRRAH!
E--EFF?
GO! TAKE MILA! GO!
HSSSSS!
MOMMY!

DON'T LOOK, MILA! CLOSE YOUR EYES!
DON'T LOOK!
HSSS!
HSSSSS!
HSSSSS!
HSSSSS!

MOMMY!
VLEEEP
WRRMMMM

NOW.
CHOOM CHOOM
CHOOM CHOOM
GRAAAARRRR!
DADDY!
I TOLD YOU TO GO!
I'M **NOT** LEAVING YOU, DADDY.
FRA!

BANDIT, NO! COME BACK!
FRA!
BANDIT! GET OUT OF HERE!
FRA!
FRA!
EEP! DANGER DETECTED--ACTIVATE GUARD DOG MODE.
FRA!
BANDIT?
CHRK
FRA!
FRA!

KZZZAAAKK
FRA!
...WHOA.

4

MATA.
--PLEASE.
--PLEASE.

BE QUIET!
PLEASE LET ME OUT.

NEVER.
...NEVER AGAIN.
KNOCK KNOCK
MOTHER?
WHAT IS IT?!
YOU HAVE VISITORS...
IT IS THE TWINS. THEY--THEY SAY IT IS URGENT.
-SIGH- VERY WELL, VIX. ONE MOMENT.

M-MOTHER. W-WE ARE VERY S-S-SORRY TO COME UNANNOUNCED LIKE THIS. BUT W-WE HAVE NEWS.
ONE OF YOU MORONS BETTER START EXPLAINING.
SHAAAAAA
EXPLAIN.
EXPLAIN.
EXPLAIN.
YES, YOU BETTER EXPLAIN. YOU INTERRUPTED THIS **LITTLE BITCH**. SHE WAS BUSY WITH **HER SECRETS**.

CAREFUL, MOTHERS. I AM FLESH, YOU ARE NOT. YOUR TONGUE CAN BE SILENCED FOREVER SHOULD I CHOOSE IT TO BE SO!
THOBIN, FROBIN. SPEAK. OR ***YOUR TONGUES*** WILL BE ON MY FLOOR.
WE--WE H-H-HAVE JUST COME F-F-FROM AMUN.
AS YOU KNOW, WE HAVE BEEN ESTABLISHING A NEW BASE AND STAGING GROUND THERE. THE FORMER UGC REBELS HAVE BEEN VERY ACTIVE IN THAT AREA LATELY, MAKING SEVERAL RAIDS ON AMUN.
YOU HAVE SAID NOTHING THAT I DON'T ALREADY KNOW FULL WELL, THOBIN. THERE HAD BETTER BE ***A POINT.***
THERE IS, MOTHER. WE SWEAR.
Y-YOU S-S-SEE, WE S-S-SET A TRAP FOR THEM, M-MOTHER...
AND T-THE T-TRAP WORKED. W-WE HAVE ***C-C-CAPTURED*** THE ***R-REBEL LEADER!***

BANDIT?!
CHAK
FRA!
DID YOU KNOW HE COULD DO THAT?!
...NO.
MAKES ME WONDER WHAT ELSE HE CAN DO.
WHERE *DID* YOU COME FROM, BANDIT?
FRA! FRA!

SKREEEEE
D-DAD!
FRA! FRA!
MILITIA! GO! GO!

FWOOOSHH
CAN'T BANDIT GET THEM?!
I THINK BANDIT'S AS SCARED OF THEM AS WE ARE, MILA! DON'T LOOK BACK, SWEETIE, JUST KEEP ON GOING.
RUN!
RUN WHERE, DAD?!
FWOOSH

SKREEEEE
HOLD ON!
DAD...
KREEEEE
--THEY'RE COMING BACK!
DAD!
JUMP.
WHAT?!
YOU **HAVE** TO TRUST ME, SWEETHEART...

KREESCH
--JUMP!

--UNGH!

YOU OKAY?
I--I'M OKAY.

WILL THEY FOLLOW?
NOT UNTIL THEY GET BACKUP. THERE ARE ONLY THREE OF THEM. THEY KNOW BETTER.
BUT WHERE ARE THESE THINGS FLYING TO, DAD? WHERE ARE WE GOING?
RIGHT WHERE WE NEED TO GO, MILA. WHERE TURTLES ***ALWAYS*** GO...
...THE SEA.

SKREEEE
TRAMUN. THE SMALLEST MOON OF THE PLANET AMUN.
PRAISE MOTHER. SAVE US ALL.
AT EASE. WHERE IS HE?
RIGHT IN HERE, GENERAL.
MOTHER.
WELL, WELL...

W-WE DEPLOYED S-S-SEVERAL SUPPLY CONVEYS ACROSS T-T-THE AMUN STARWAY AND LET OUR C-C-CLOAKING ENCRYPTION SLIP OUT INTO T-T-THE OUTER COLONIES.
WE KNEW THE BAIT WOULD BE TOO GOOD FOR THE RESISTANCE TO PASS UP, MOTHER.
TSK. I EXPECTED **SO MUCH MORE** FROM YOU, COLONEL MILLIS.
YES, I **KNOW** WHO YOU ARE. COLONEL JESP MILLIS OF NIYRATA. I KNOW WHO YOU ARE BECAUSE I TORTURED **YOUR** FAMILY LAST YEAR. THAT IS HOW I LEARNED **YOU** WERE THE CURRENT LEADER.
YES, AND I KNOW EXACTLY WHO ***YOU*** ARE TOO, MOTHER.
I KNEW THAT YOUR HUBRIS WOULD BE TOO GREAT TO ***NOT*** COME HERE AND INTERROGATE ME YOURSELF.
WHAT ARE YOU--?
DIDN'T YOU AND YOUR MORON SONS THINK IT ODD THAT THE RESISTANCE WOULD SEND ***ITS LEADER*** TO TAKE A SIMPLE SUPPLY CONVOY?

YOU THOUGHT YOU HAD SET A TRAP. BUT *THIS*--THIS IS THE ***REAL TRAP.***
AND *I* AM THE BAIT.
HE'S BLUFFING. WE SCANNED HIM. HE IS CLEAN, MOTHER.
HEH. YOU SCANNED FOR TECHNOLOGY. BUT HAVEN'T YOU HEARD? WE HAVE OUR OWN SORCERER NOW...
--WE HAVE ***OUR OWN MAGIC.***
MOTHER!
NO!

KA-THOOOOM

WE'RE AT THE PORTS.
WE MAY NOT GET MUCH LOWER.
WE'RE GOING TO HAVE TO JUMP AGAIN, AREN'T WE?
YES. AS SOON AS WE GET OVER THE WATER.
REMEMBER TO HOLD YOUR BREATH.
FRA!
...YOU TOO, BANDIT.
YOU READY?
NO.
ME EITHER...

FRA!
HERE WE GO!

FRA!
FRA!
DAD?!
DADDY?!

DAD!
GASP!
YOU OKAY?
I'M OKAY.

FRA!
QUIET! GET IN, BANDIT.
HURRY, MILA. THE MILITIA WILL BE HERE SOON.
WHICH ONE IS IT AGAIN?
THIS ONE. THE STARFISH. THIS IS IT.
STAR
I THOUGHT YOU SAID WE WERE GOING TO FIND A SHIP, DAD... I MEAN **REAL STARSHIP.** NOT THIS PIECE OF GARBAGE.
BETTER BE CAREFUL, MILA. IF ***THE CAPTAIN*** OF THIS SHIP HEARS YOU TALKING LIKE THAT, SHE'LL THROW YOU OVERBOARD.
SHE WAS A GREAT PILOT AND A GREAT SOLDIER. YOU DON'T WANT TO MESS WITH HER, KID. TRUST ME.
REALLY? *UH*...IS THAT HER?

...
OH BOY.

SAMPSON.
TELSA! WAKE UP, GODSDAMMIT!
WHAP
DAD! DON'T HIT HER!
FRA!
WAKE UP!
JUST--KEEP THAT DOG QUIET, MILA!
--DADDY!
NOT NOW!
TELSA! WAKE THE HELL UP!
ENOUGH!

YOU WILL **NOT** LAY A HAND ON **MY CAPTAIN** AGAIN, HUMAN!
IT--IT'S OKAY, HELDA. HE'S AN OLD FRIEND.
...KIND OF.

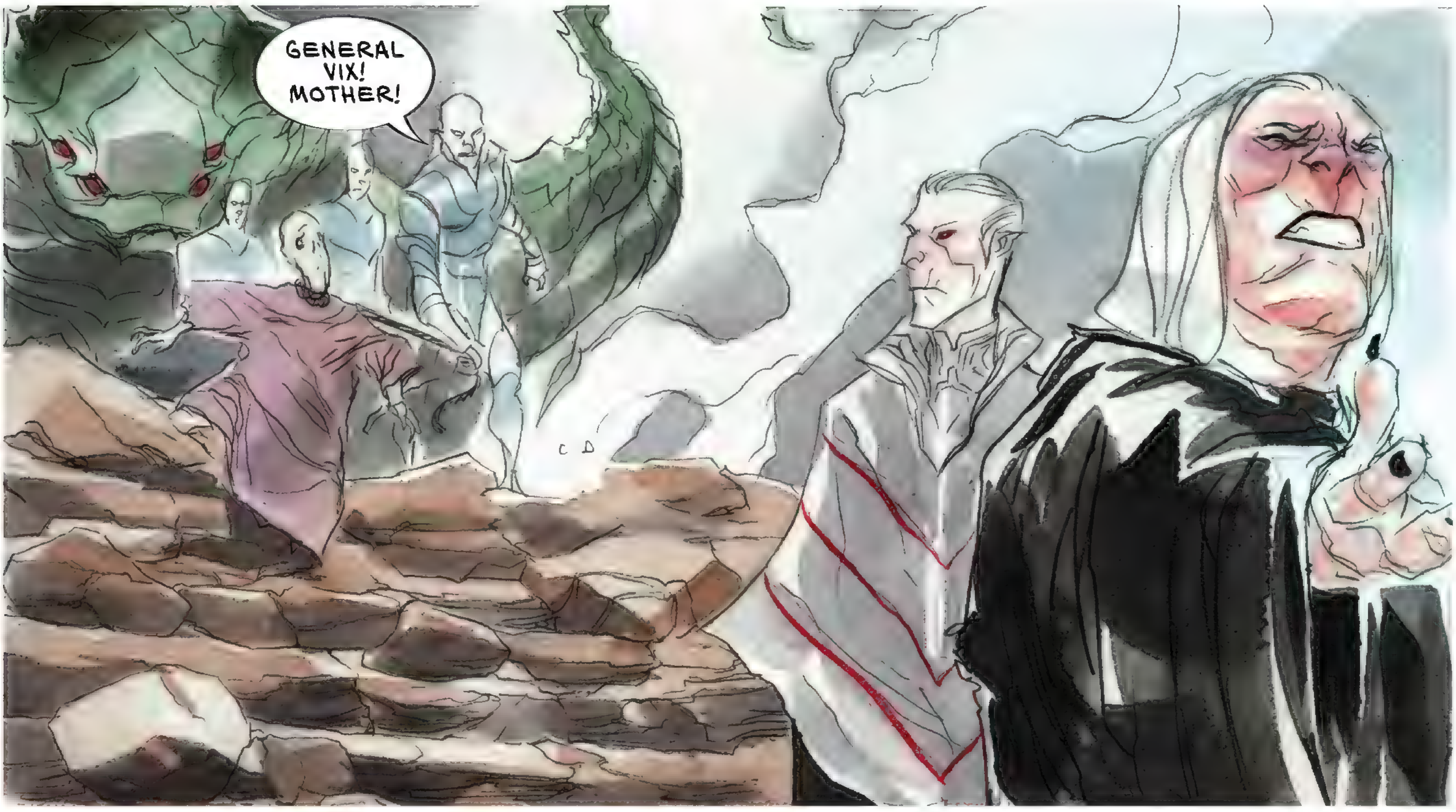
WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE, ANDY?
WE-- WE NEED TO **GET AWAY FROM HERE,** TELSA.
SO, GET AWAY FROM HERE. WHAT'S IT GOT TO DO **WITH ME?**
WE-- WE NEED TO GET **OFF-PLANET.**
...
I CAN'T HELP YOU WITH THAT. SORRY.
BULL! WE **BOTH** KNOW THAT **YOU KNOW** WHERE THERE ARE SHIPS. **REAL SHIPS.**
I--I DON'T HAVE ANY MONEY. I CAN'T PAY YOU. BUT I NEED HELP. TELSA. THERE-- THERE IS NO ONE ELSE WE CAN GO TO.
SURE THERE IS. LOTS OF PIRATES AT THIS PORT WILL TAKE YOU ON. I'M NOT GETTING CAUGHT UP IN THIS.

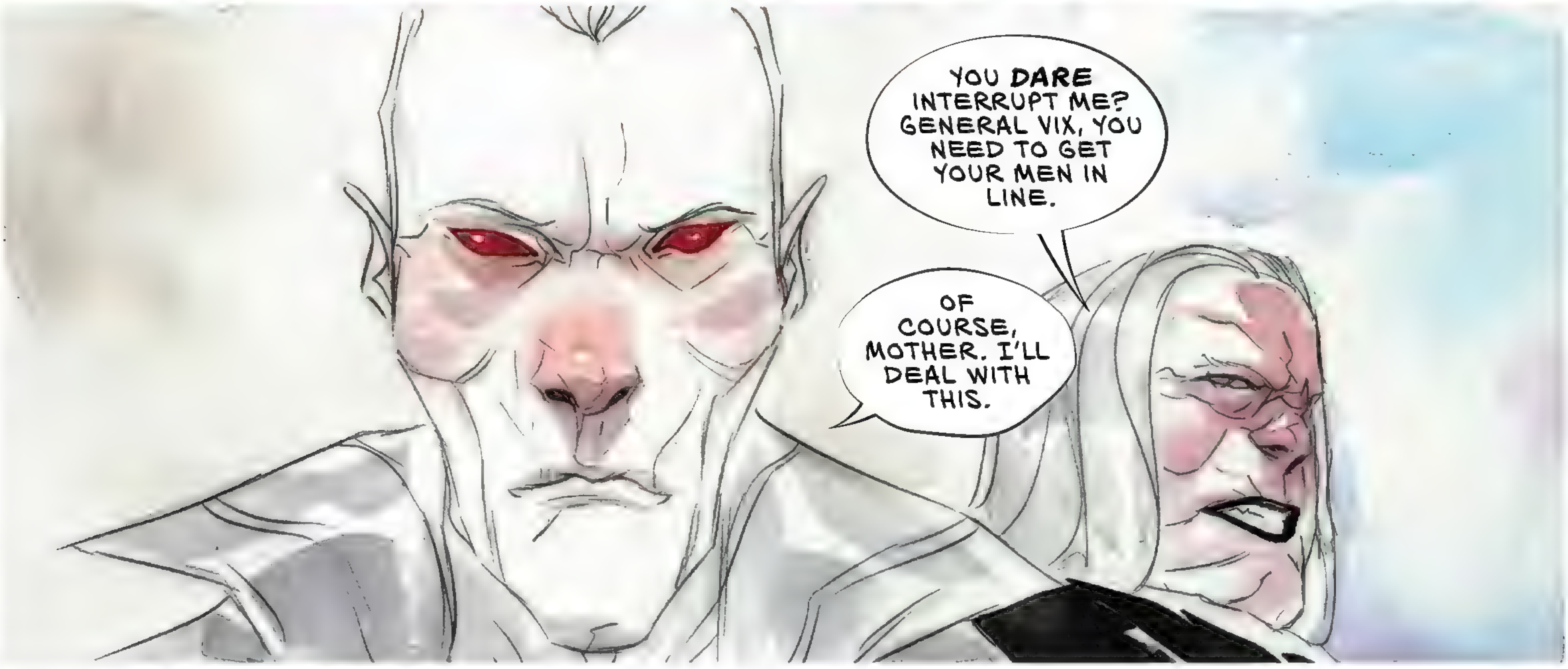
PLEASE! MY DAD KILLED A VAMP AND THEN BANDIT KILLED A GIANT AND NOW THE MILITIA IS COMING FOR US!
NOT MY PROBLEM!
WAIT...DID YOU JUST SAY, **BANDIT** KILLED A GIANT?
FRA!
HOLY SHIT.

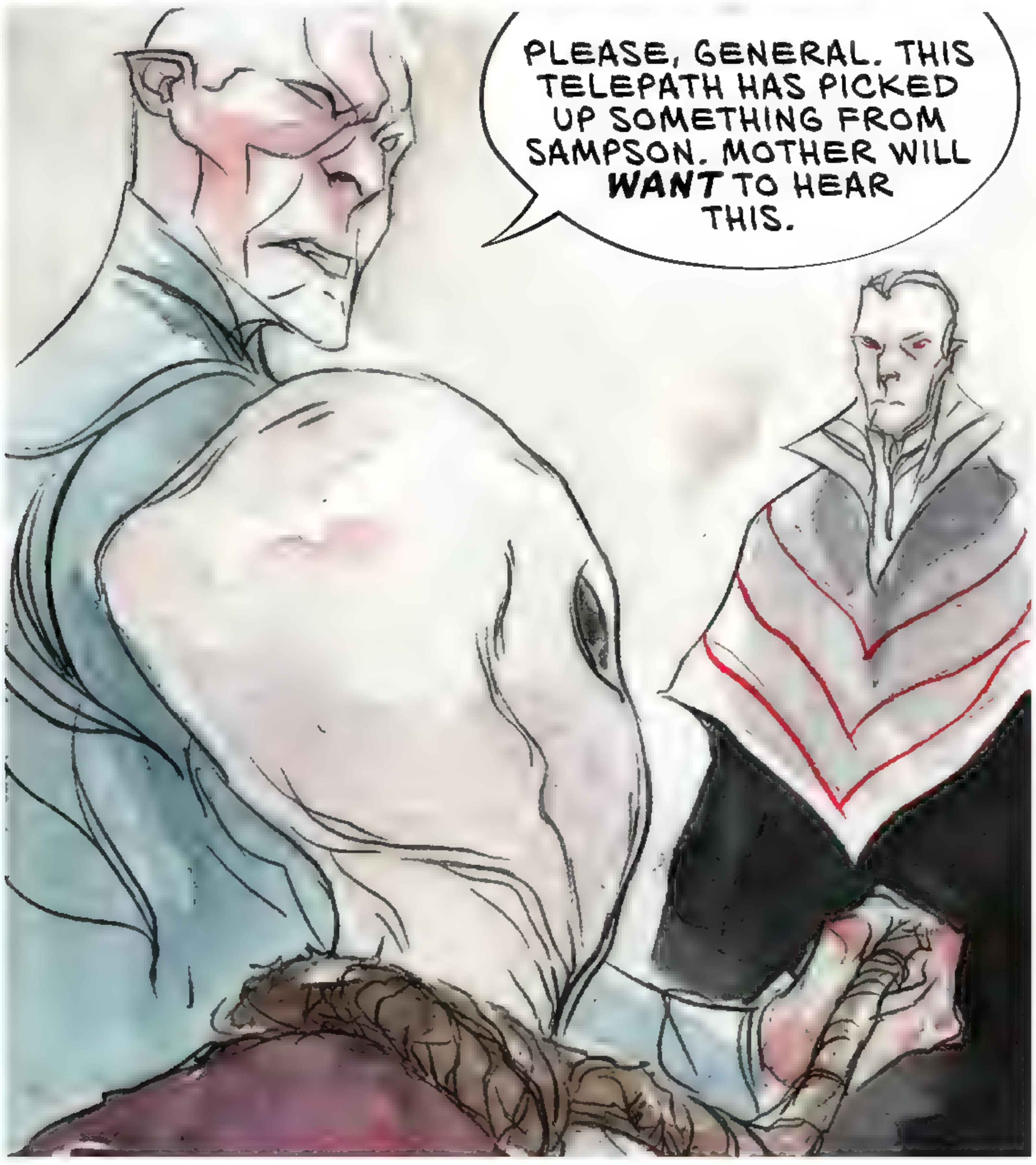
TRAMUN. THE SMALLEST MOON OF AMUN.
M-M-MOTHER!
YOU SAVED US! PRAISE MOTHER!
SAVED YOU?
YOU IDIOTS LED ME RIGHT INTO A REBEL TRAP!

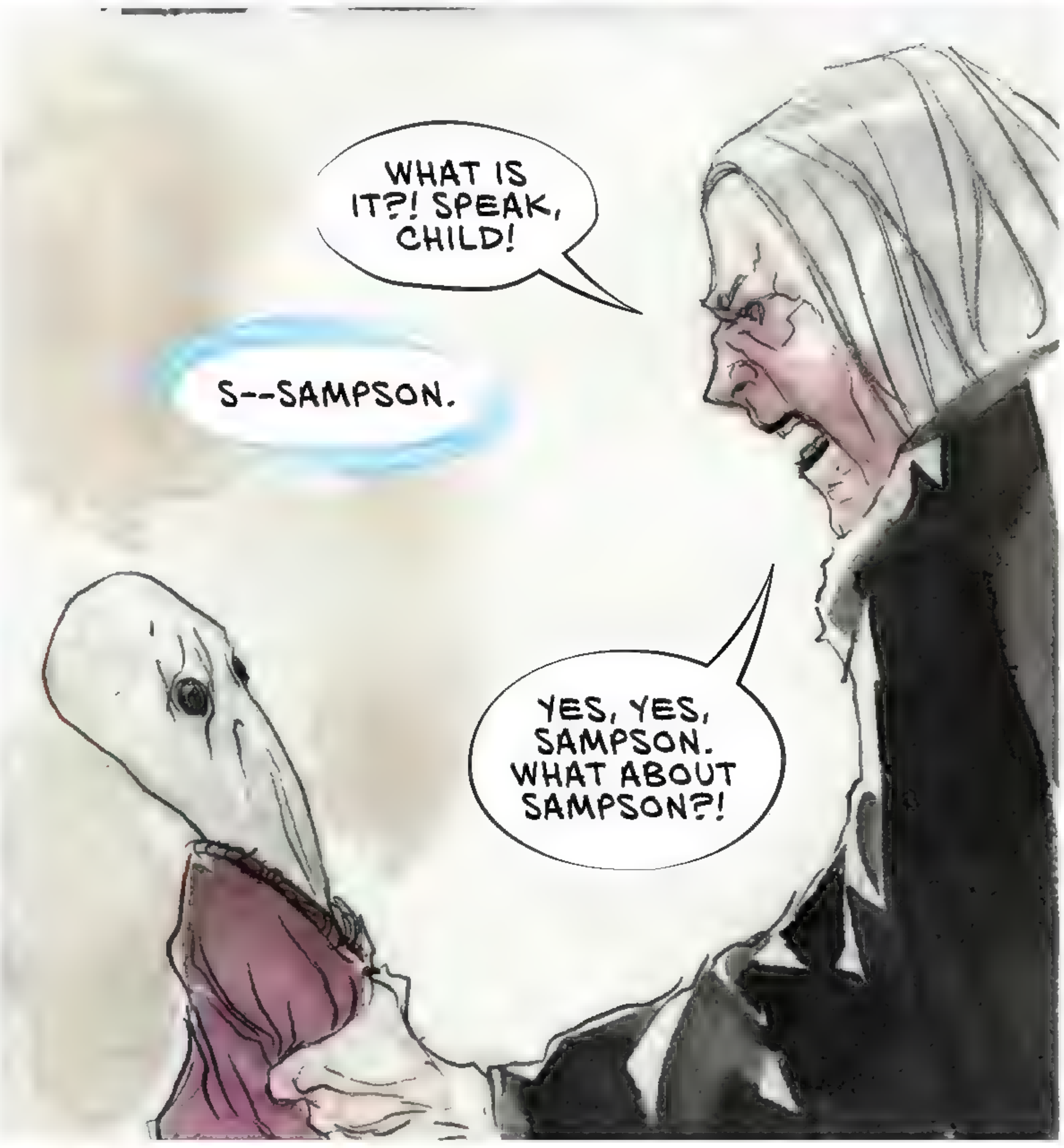
WHICH ONE?!
ANSWER ME! WHICH ONE?!
--GAK!
WH-WHAT?
ONE OF YOU PITIFUL EXCUSES FOR SORCERERS IS GOING TO PAY FOR THIS INCOMPETENCE.
I'LL LET YOU DECIDE...WHICH ONE OF YOU DIES?

P-P-PLEASE, MOTHER. MY BR-BR-BROTHER NOR I COULD P-P-POSSIBLY HAVE KNOWN THE R-R-RREBEL LEADER HAD A BOMB INSIDE OF HIM.
W-WE SCANNED HIM FOR ALL T-T-T-TECH.
THAT EXPLOSION WAS **NOT** TECH. THAT WAS **MAGIC.**
ARE YOU TELLING ME YOU TWO FOOLS DID NOT THINK TO DO A **SIMPLE DIVINING SPELL** EVEN THOUGH YOU KNOW THE REBELS ARE WORKING WITH A SORCERER **OF THEIR OWN** NOW?!
P-P-PLEASE HAVE MERCY, MOTHER. PLEASE SP-SP-SPARE US!
HIM.
SPARE ME AND KILL **HIM,** MOTHER. I WILL NEVER FAIL YOU AGAIN.
WHAT?!
OH PLEASE. WE BOTH KNOW YOU'RE THE WEAK ONE, FROBIN.


GENERAL VIX! MOTHER!

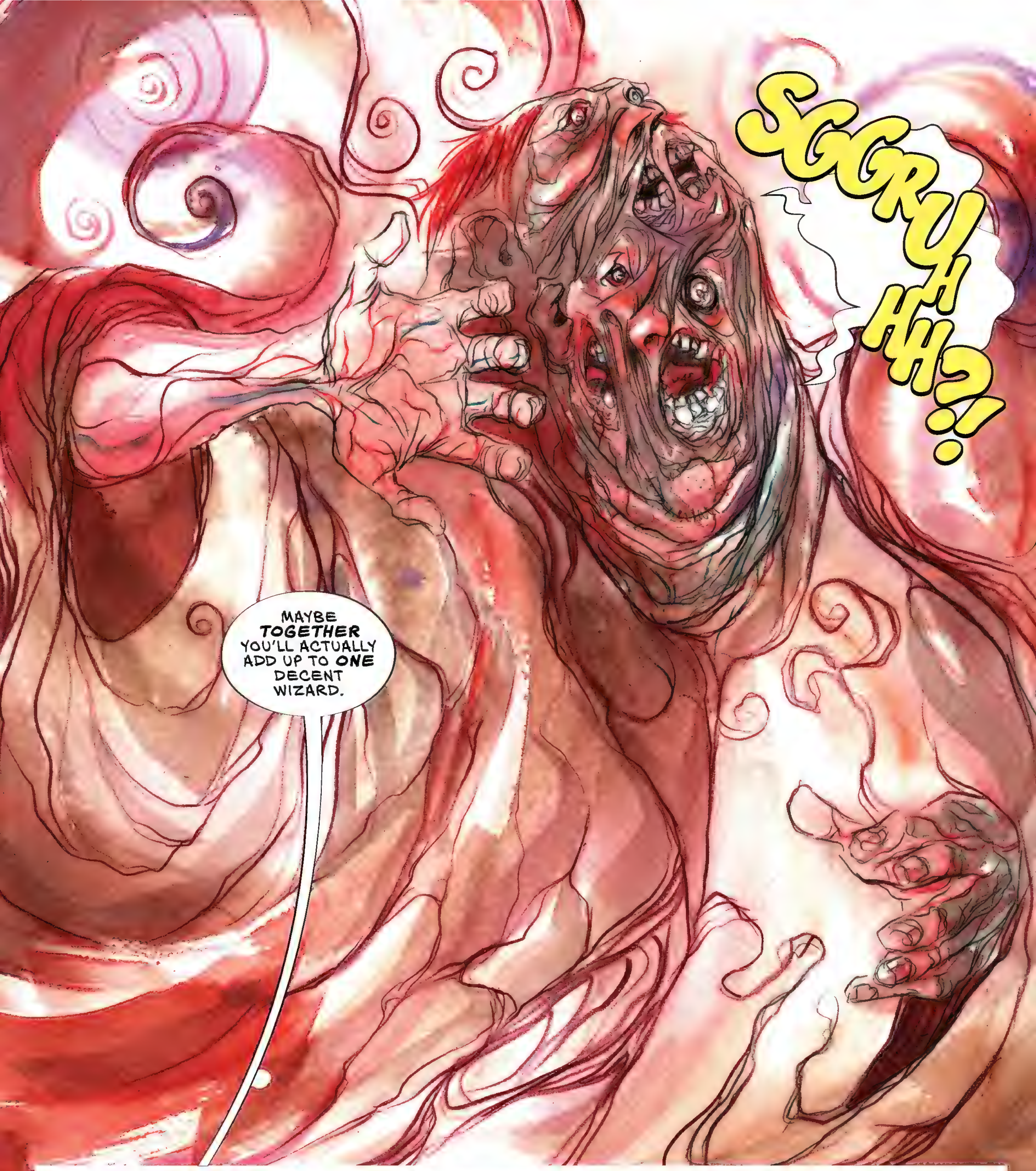

YOU **DARE** INTERRUPT ME? GENERAL VIX, YOU NEED TO GET YOUR MEN IN LINE.
OF COURSE, MOTHER. I'LL DEAL WITH THIS.

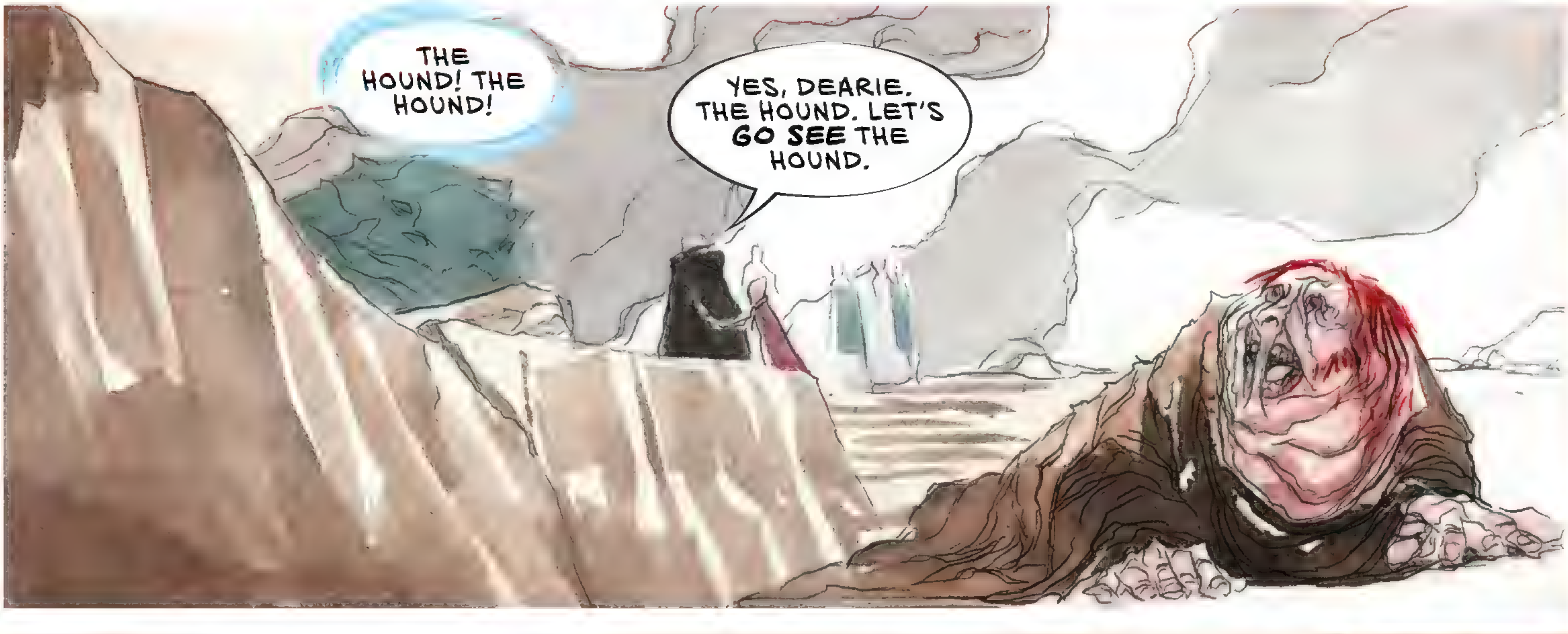

PLEASE, GENERAL. THIS TELEPATH HAS PICKED UP SOMETHING FROM SAMPSON. MOTHER WILL **WANT** TO HEAR THIS.


WHAT IS IT?! SPEAK, CHILD!
S--SAMPSON.
YES, YES, SAMPSON. WHAT ABOUT SAMPSON?!

HOUND--THE HOUND...
FRA! FRA!
...THE HOUND WITH THE BACKWARDS TONGUE.

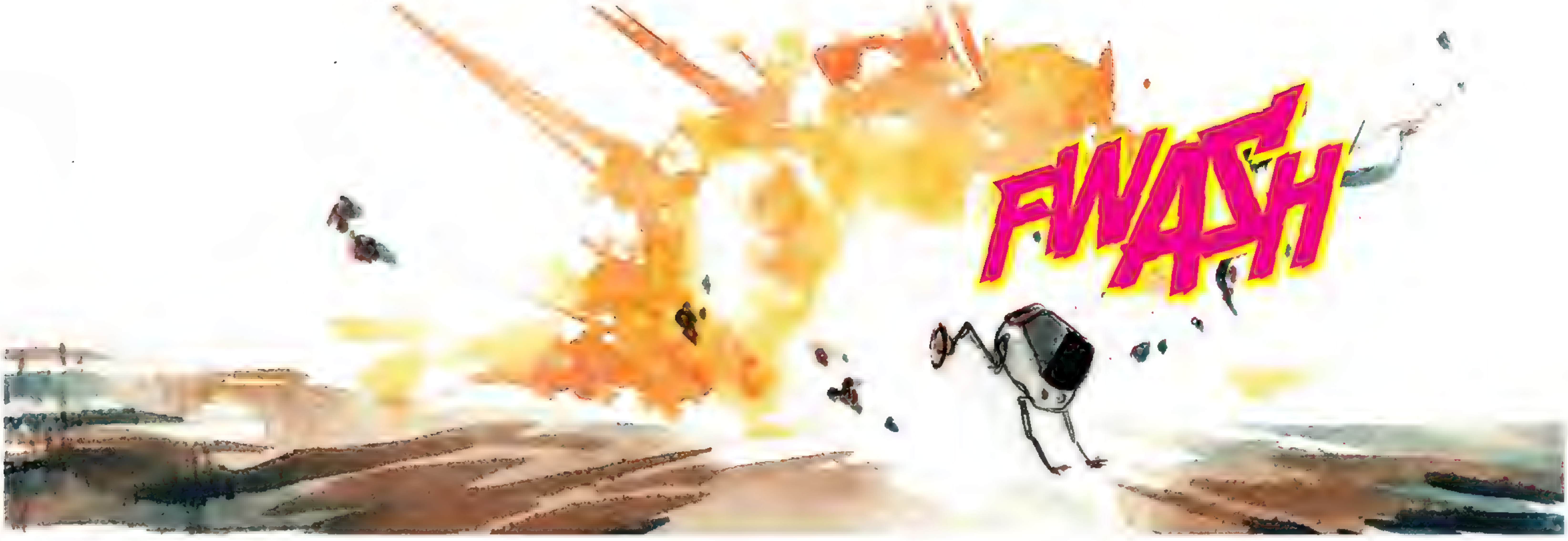
COME, VIX. WE ARE GOING TO SAMPSON.
YES, MOTHER.
WHAT--WHAT ABOUT US? THERE ARE NO MORE SHIPS HERE. JUST YOURS, MOTHER.
OH YES, I'D ALMOST FORGOTTEN ABOUT YOU TWO.
YOU TWO...
MAYBE THAT'S THE PROBLEM. TWO OF YOU. MAYBE KILLING ONE OF YOU ISN'T THE ANSWER...
BUT THEN, I DID SAY ONLY ONE OF YOU WOULD LIVE. AND I DO SO LIKE TO KEEP MY PROMISES, DEARS.

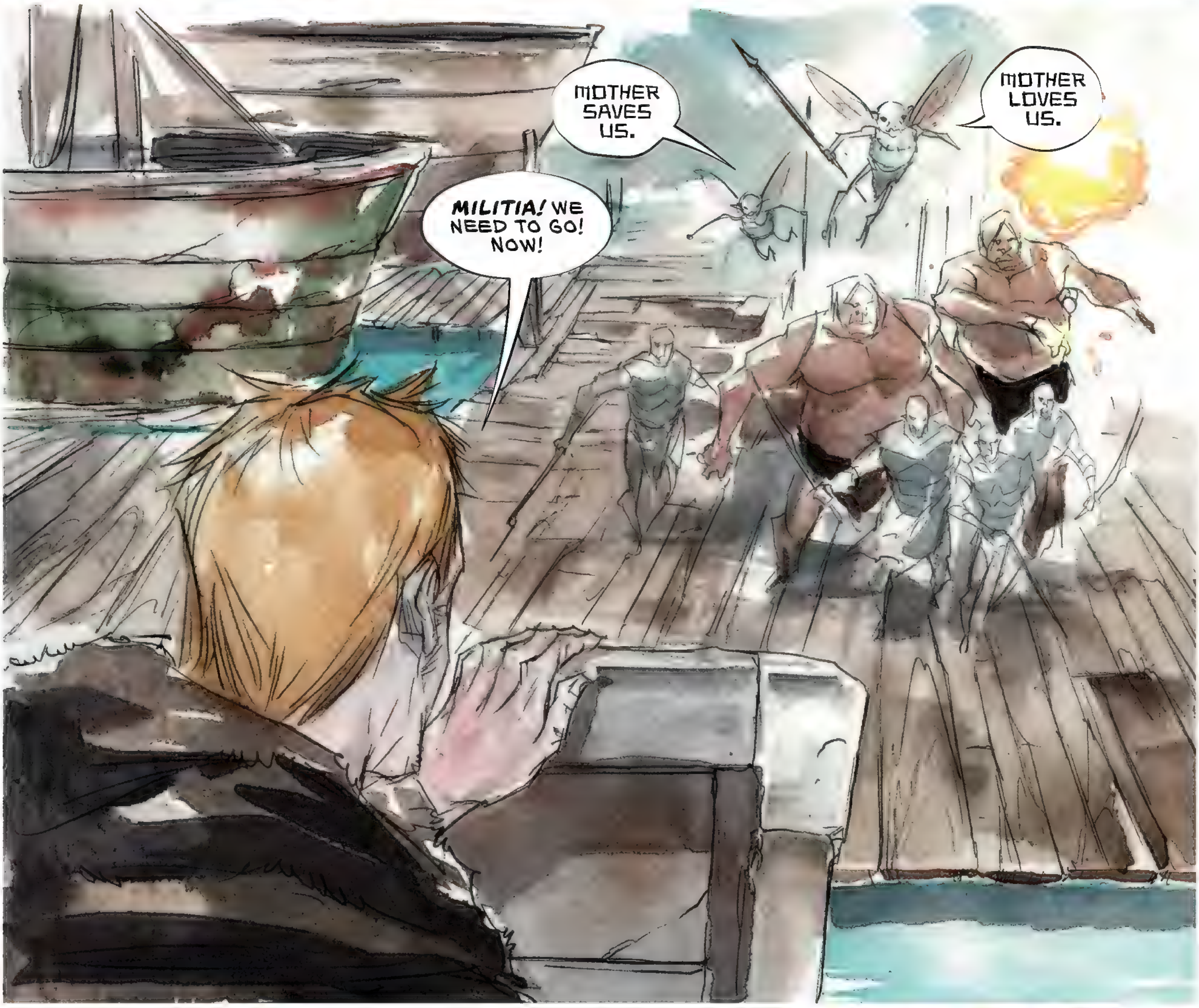

SGGRUHHH?!
MAYBE TOGETHER YOU'LL ACTUALLY ADD UP TO ONE DECENT WIZARD.

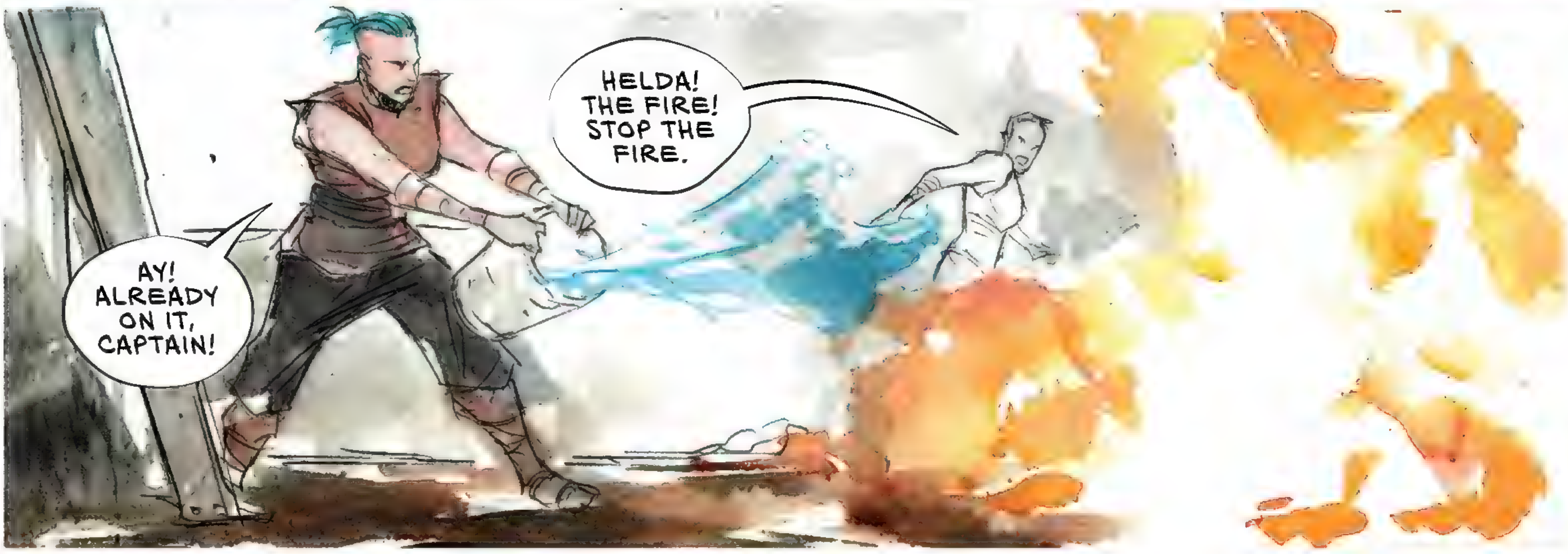

THE HOUND! THE HOUND!
YES, DEARIE. THE HOUND. LET'S GO SEE THE HOUND.

FRA! FRA!
DO YOU WANT I SHOULD THROW IT OVERBOARD, CAPTAIN?
NO...
FRA! FRA!
I THINK HE LIKES YOU.
THIS IS-- I CAN'T BELIEVE HE'S HERE.
TIM?!
IS TIM--?
NO. JUST BANDIT. WE HAVE NO IDEA HOW HE GOT HERE OR WHERE HE'S BEEN.

YOU'RE GOING TO GET ME KILLED, ANDY. YOU KNOW THAT?
NOT IF YOU GET US OUT OF HERE. WE CAN GET OFF-WORLD TOGETHER.
EVEN IF I COULD FIND US A SHIP AND WE GET OFF SAMPSON. THEN WHAT? AND ***WHERE*** WOULD WE EVEN GO?!
...I THINK HE'S SHOWING US WHERE.
FRA!


FWASH


MOTHER SAVES US.
MOTHER LOVES US.
MILITIA! WE NEED TO GO! NOW!

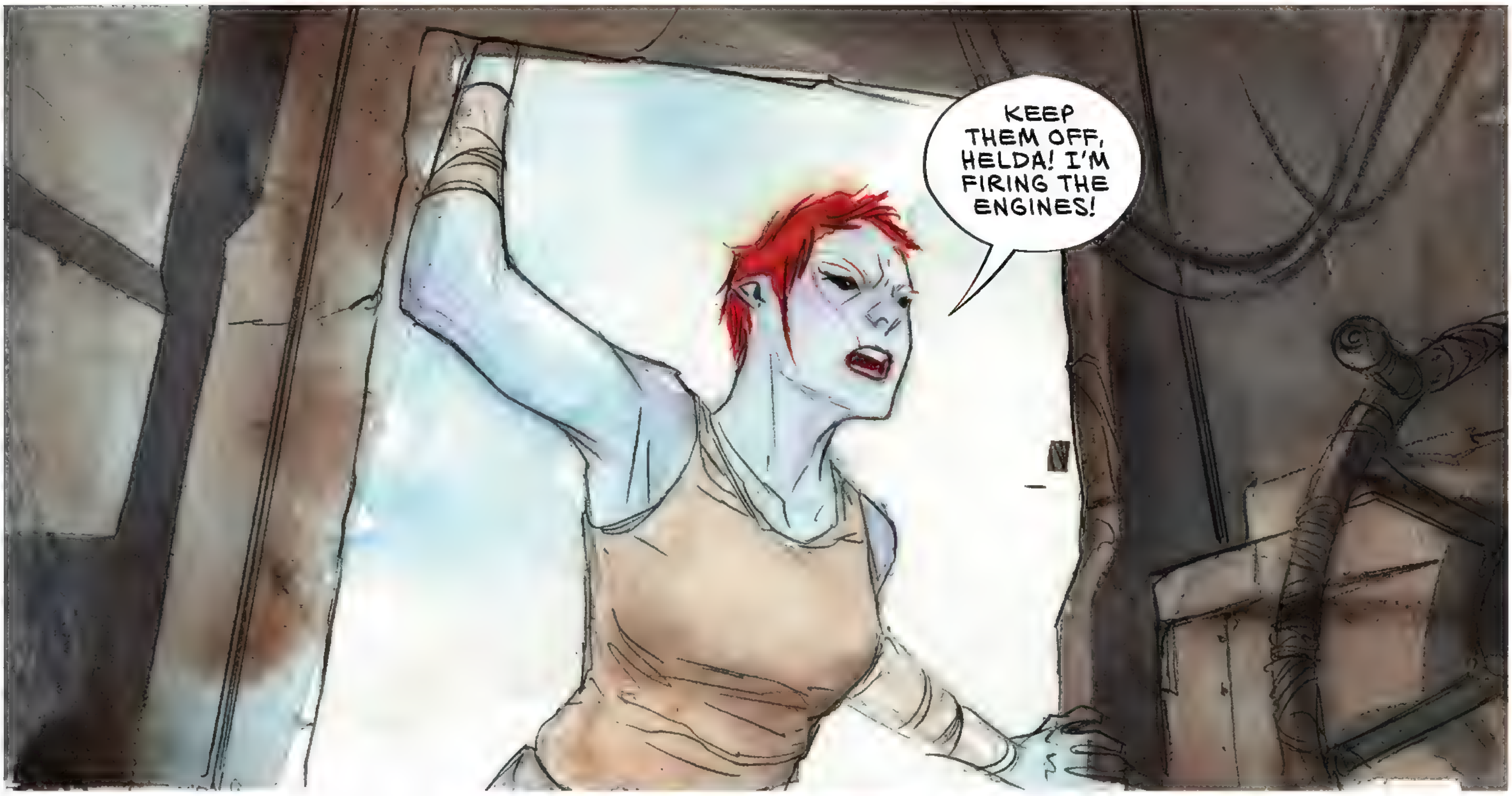

HELDA! THE FIRE! STOP THE FIRE.
AY! ALREADY ON IT, CAPTAIN!

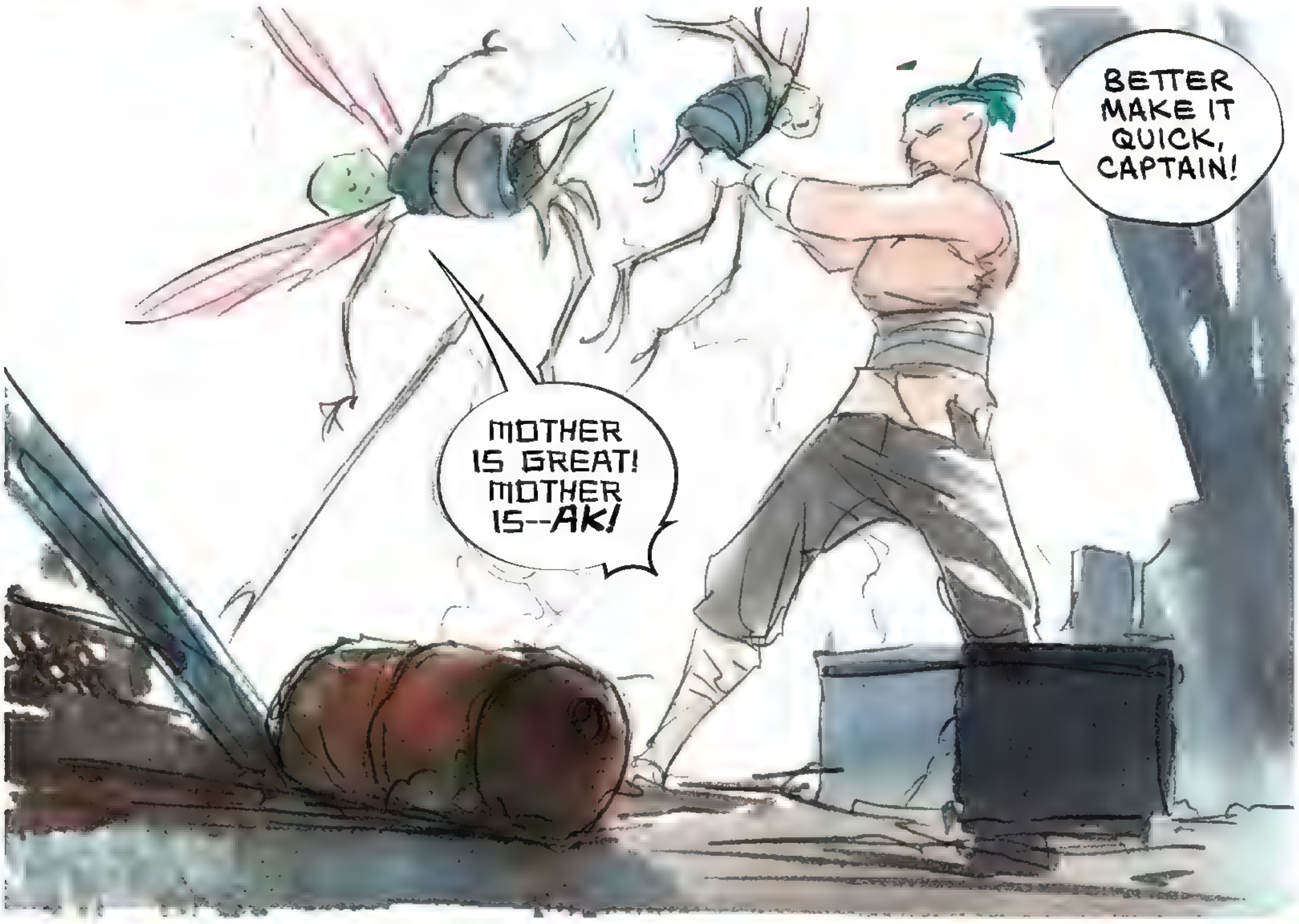
TAKE YOUR KID AND THAT BOT AND GET OFF MY BOAT! **NOW!**
WE ARE NOT GETTING OFF THIS BOAT! YOU ARE EITHER GOING TO HAVE TO SAIL US ALL OUT OF HERE, OR THE MILITIA GETS US **ALL**, TELSA!
GET OFF! I AM NOT GOING DOWN FOR YOU OR THAT BOT!
TELSA, PLEASE! SHE'S JUST A KID!
DON'T PULL THAT ON ME! I'M NOT FALLING FOR THAT, ANDY! NOT AGAIN.
TELSA... SHE'S MY **LITTLE GIRL.** ME AND EFF. SHE'S--SHE'S ALL I HAVE LEFT IN THE UNIVERSE.
I--I CAN'T LOSE HER.

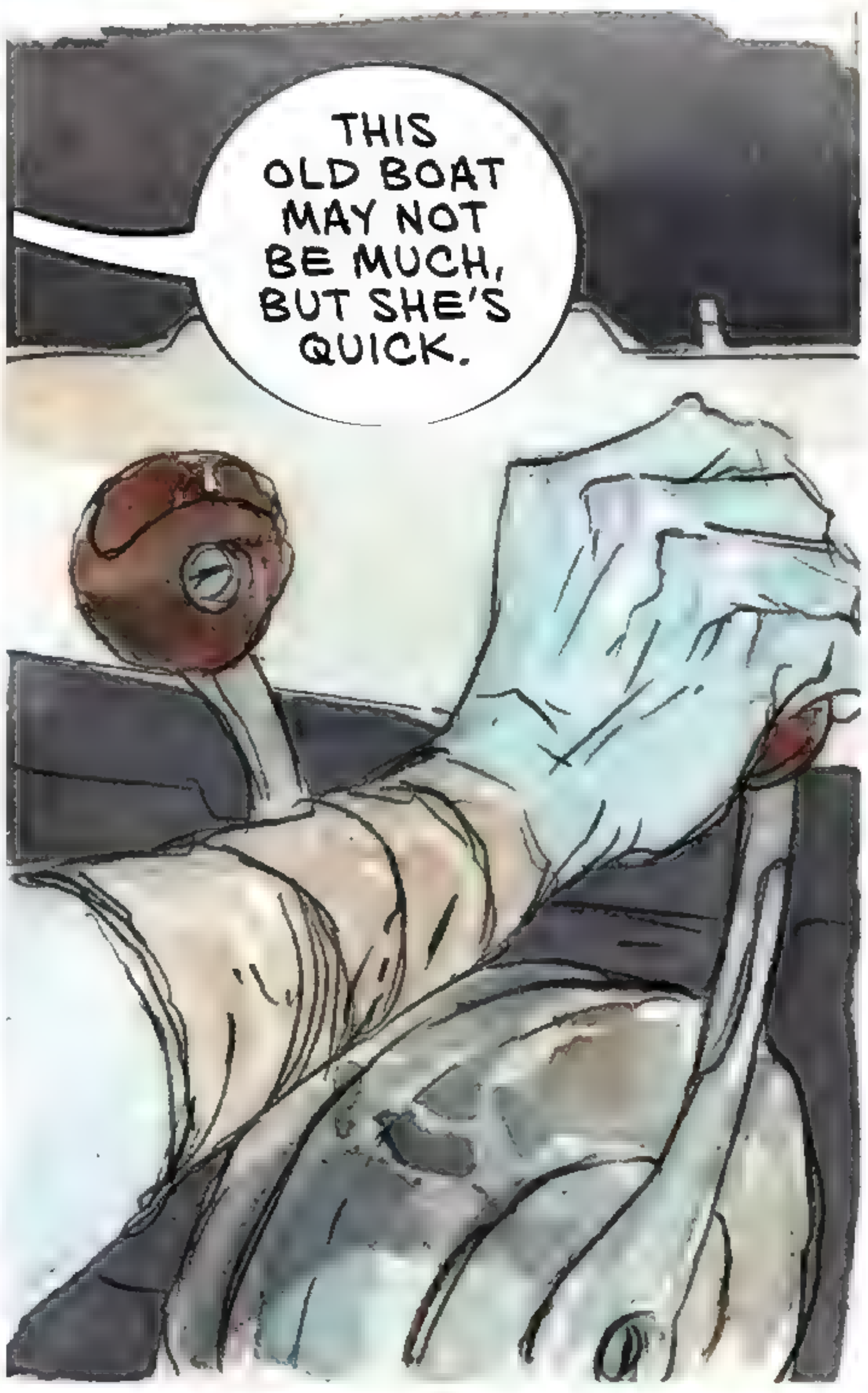
--KKT!
DADDY!

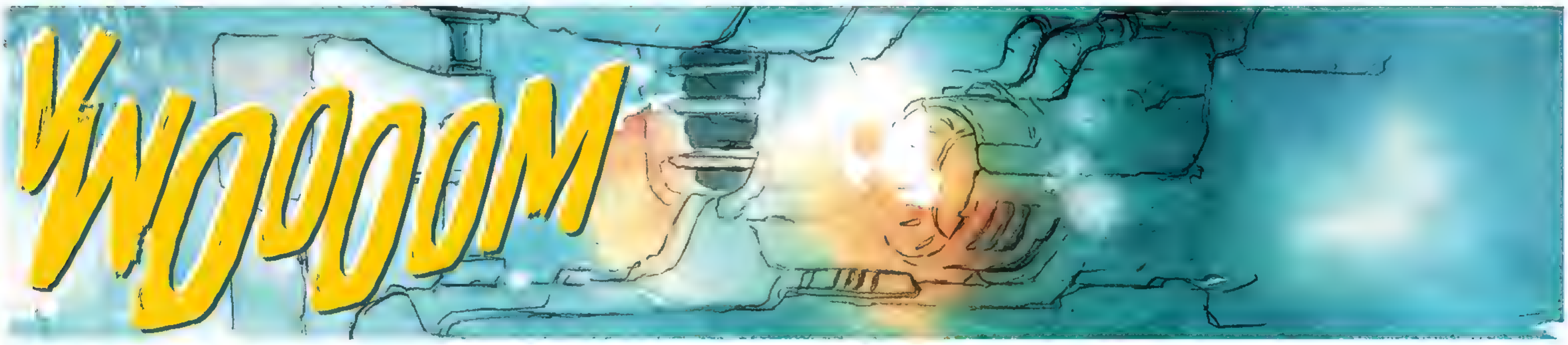
ANDY!
DADDY!
MOTHER IS ALWAYS WATCHING.
HELDA! PULL UP ANCHOR!
AY, CAPTAIN!
NO!
FRA!

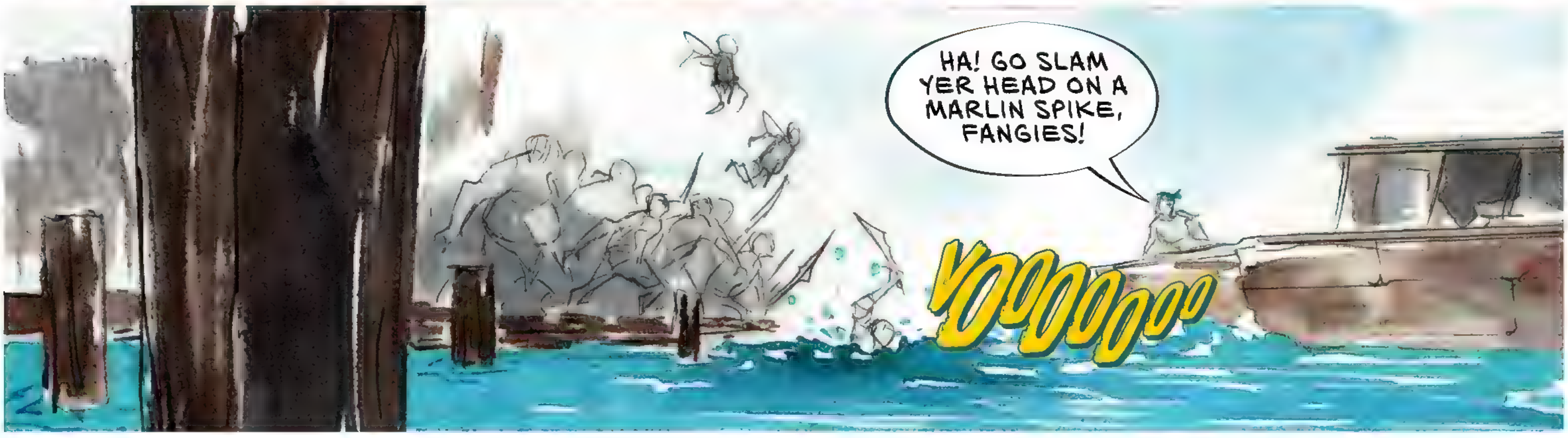
GRAARRH!
FRA!
PICK ON SOMEONE YER OWN SIZE, YA ARSE-FACED PIG!
GRAAHH!
NOW, GET OFF'A MY BOAT!


KEEP THEM OFF, HELDA! I'M FIRING THE ENGINES!


BETTER MAKE IT QUICK, CAPTAIN!
MOTHER IS GREAT! MOTHER IS--AK!


THIS OLD BOAT MAY NOT BE MUCH, BUT SHE'S QUICK.

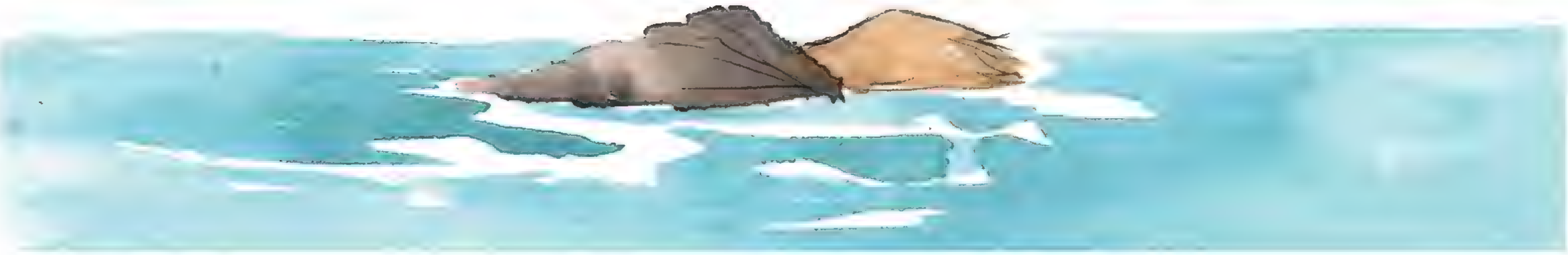

VVOOOOOM

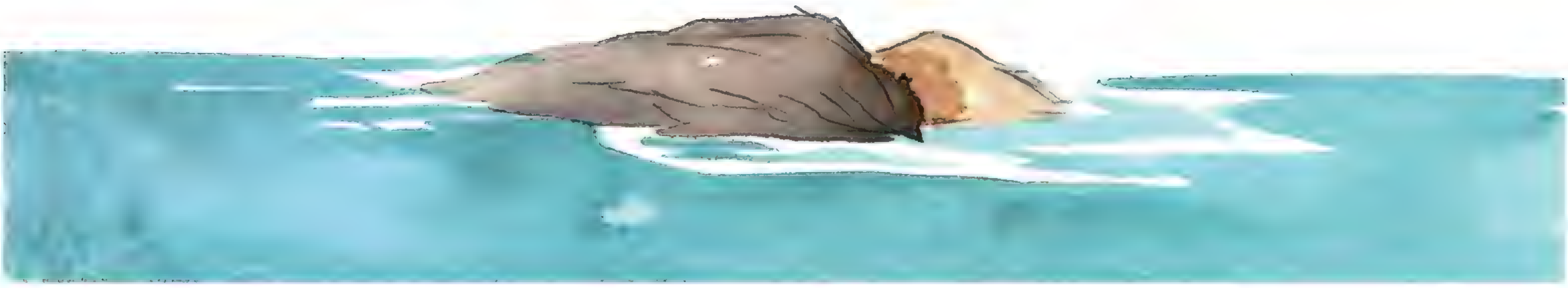

HA! GO SLAM YER HEAD ON A MARLIN SPIKE, FANGIES!
VVOOOOOOOO

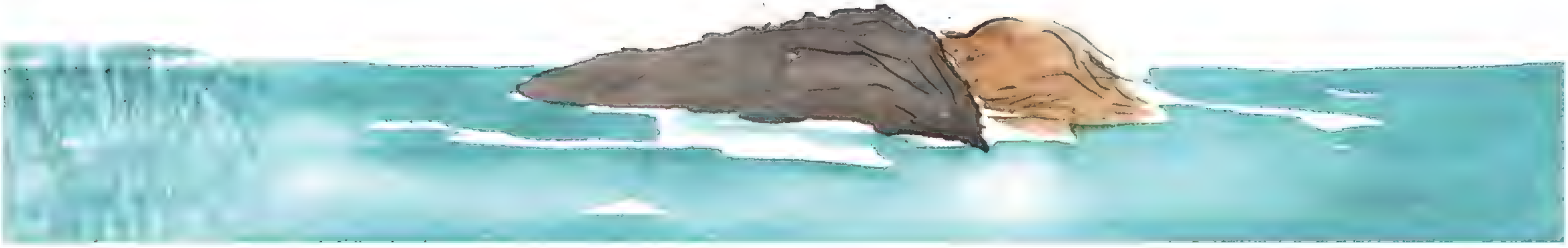
DADDY! NO!
EASY, GIRL!
NO! GET OFF OF ME!
STOP! STOP, GODSDAMMIT, OR I WILL THROW YOU OVER!
WE--WE CAN'T GO! WE CAN'T LEAVE DADDY...
WE HAVE TO...I--I'M SORRY.

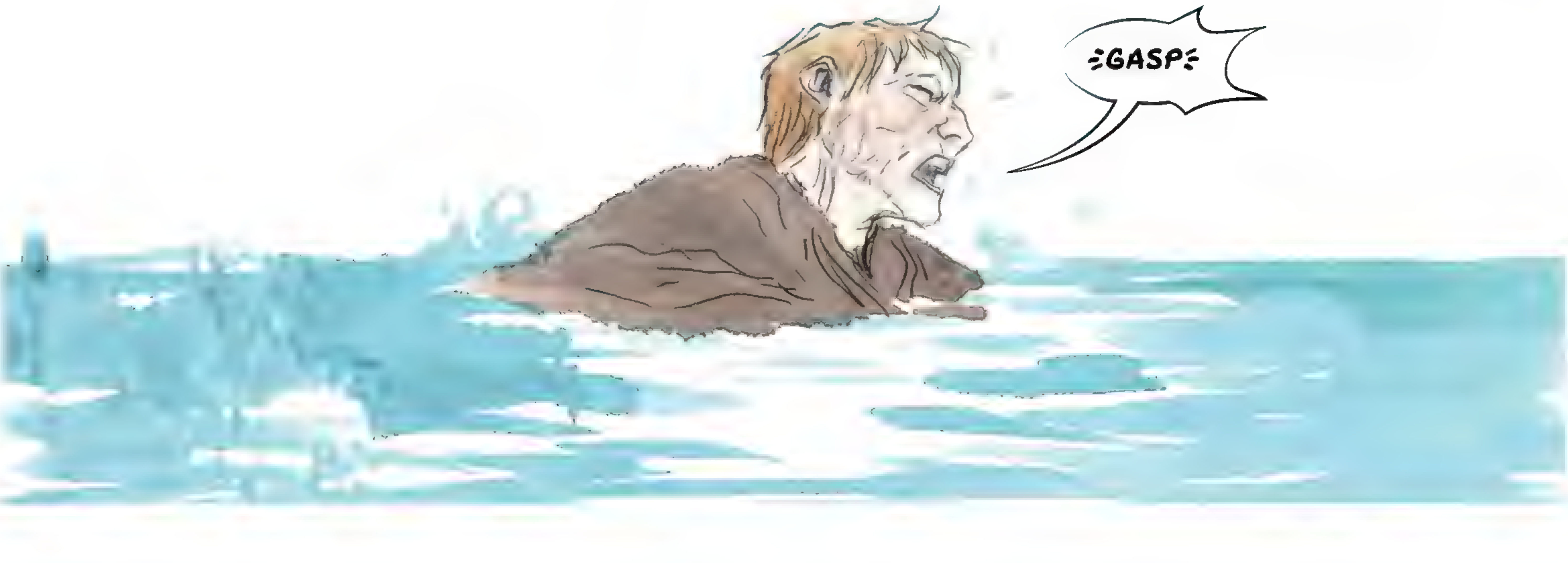
FRA?
FRA.
BANDIT... HE'S GONE. HE'S REALLY GONE.

NOW WHAT ARE WE GONNA DO, CAPTAIN?
THE ONLY THING WE CAN. HELDA...
WE FIND A SHIP. WE GET THIS GIRL OFF-PLANET.
AND WE NEVER COME BACK.



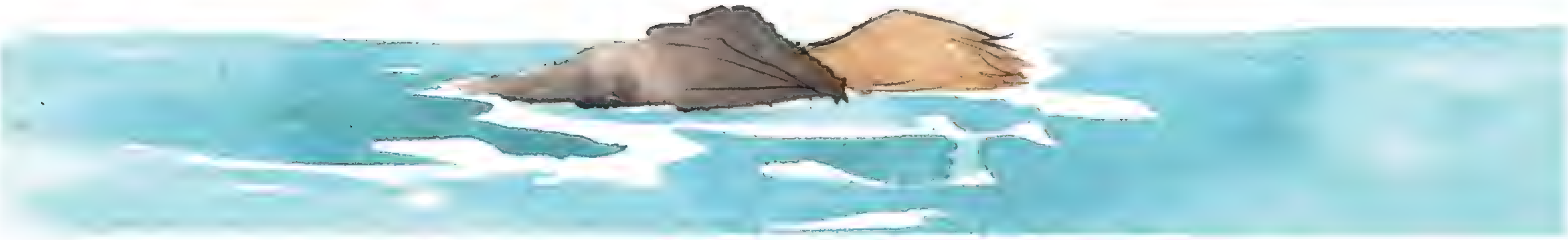


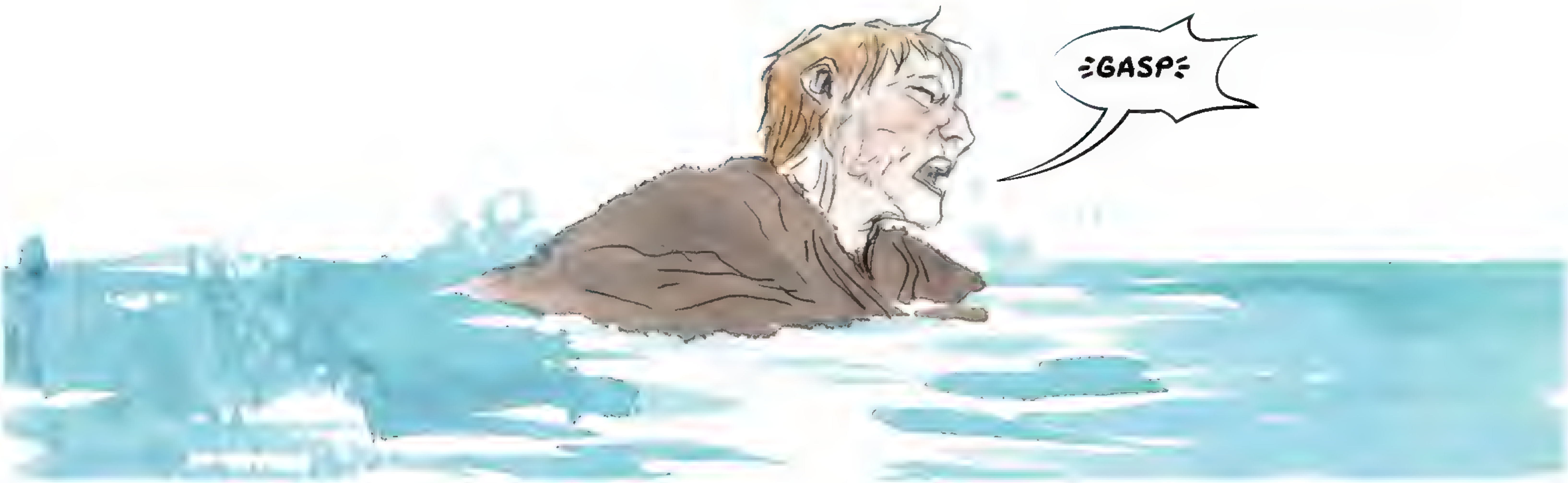


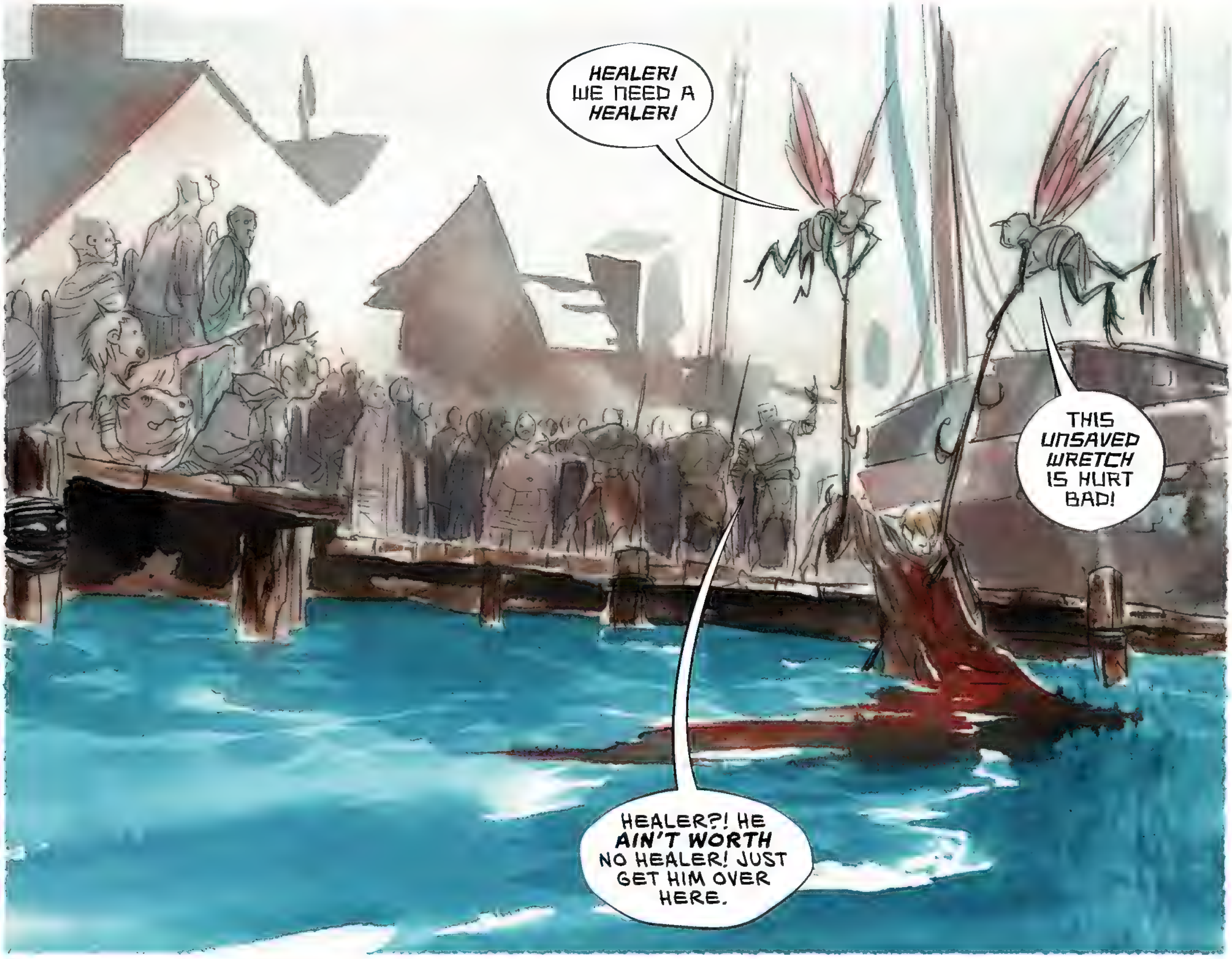

GASP

6

THE PLANET SAMPSON.






HEALER! WE NEED A HEALER!
THIS UNSAVED WRETCH IS HURT BAD!
HEALER?! HE AIN'T WORTH NO HEALER! JUST GET HIM OVER HERE.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?
HMMM...
YEAH, MIGHT WANNA INTERROGATE HIM.
HEALER! HURRY IT UP!
COMING! COMING! OUT OF MY WAY! OUT OF MY WAY!
OH DEAR! OH DEAR! WHAT A MESS, WHAT A MESS!
--MILA?
EVERYONE STAND BACK! STAND BACK, EVERYONE!
OH, THIS **WILL** HURT. THIS WILL HURT!
PRAISE MOTHER! PRAISE MOTHER!
ARRRGHHH!

CAREFUL WITH HIM! CAREFUL WITH HIM!
YEAH, YEAH...BE CAREFUL ALL RIGHT.
OPEN IT UP, WE GOT A FRESH ONE!
--UNGHH
IN YOU GO!
WELCOME ABOARD.
GOTTA GET OUT OF HERE!
OUT OF HERE?! THERE AIN'T NOWHERE TO GO, FELLA!
BESIDES, WE'RE ALL JUST FEED NOW ANYWAY.
FEED?

"YEAH, WE ARE FOOD. THEY'RE TAKING US TO THE VAMP CAMPS."

WHAT ARE WE GONNA DO WITH A KIDDIE, TELSA?
WE DON'T HAVE A HELL OF A LOT OF CHOICES DO WE? ONLY A MATTER OF TIME UNTIL THE MILITIA FINDS US. WE NEED TO GET OFF-WORLD.
ON THE RUN AGAIN, *HUH,* CAPTAIN?
SAME OLD STORY.
SAME OLD STORY.

HEY, KID.
FRA!
LOOK, UM...THERE ARE BEDS DOWNSTAIRS. IF YOU NEED TO SLEEP OR--
I KNOW THIS IS HARD, KID. I'M SORRY ABOUT ANDY-- YOUR DAD, I MEAN.
MILA.
WHAT'S THAT?
MY **NAME** IS MILA. ***QUIT CALLING ME KID!***
SURE. YOU GOT IT.
AND YOU ***DON'T*** HAVE ANY IDEA ***WHAT*** THIS FEELS LIKE, SO JUST SAVE YOUR LITTLE PEP TALK, OKAY?

OKAY BY ME. MIND IF I SIT AT LEAST?
IT'S YOUR SHIP.
SURE IS.
SO, YOU KNOW WHAT YOU JUST SAID, ABOUT ME NOT KNOWING WHAT YOU'RE GOING THROUGH?
...WELL, ACTUALLY I DO.
MY DAD WAS KILLED TOO. RIGHT IN FRONT OF ME.

REALLY?
YEAH. IN THE SECOND DESCENDER ATTACKS.
MY--MY MOM AND MY DAD WERE THERE. IN THE SECOND ATTACK.
I KNOW. WE WERE TOGETHER WHEN IT HAPPENED.
DID YOU KNOW MY DAD'S LITTLE BROTHER? DID YOU ACTUALLY KNOW TIM-21?
...
YEAH. I KNEW HIM.

WHAT DID YOU DO? AFTER YOUR DAD DIED, I MEAN?
WELL, RIGHT AFTER, I WAS LOST JUST LIKE EVERYONE ELSE.
THEN I WAS **REALLY ANGRY.**
ME TOO.
DOES THAT EVER GO AWAY?
...
NO.
WHAT DO YOU THINK BANDIT'S MAP IS FOR? DO YOU THINK IT HAS SOMETHING TO DO WITH TIM-21?
I HAVE NO IDEA. MAYBE. WHATEVER IT IS, THE MILITIA WANTS IT, BAD.
ARE WE GOING TO MAKE IT? OFF-WORLD?
YOU BETTER BELIEVE IT. THIS SHIP CAN OUTRUN ***ANYTHING.***

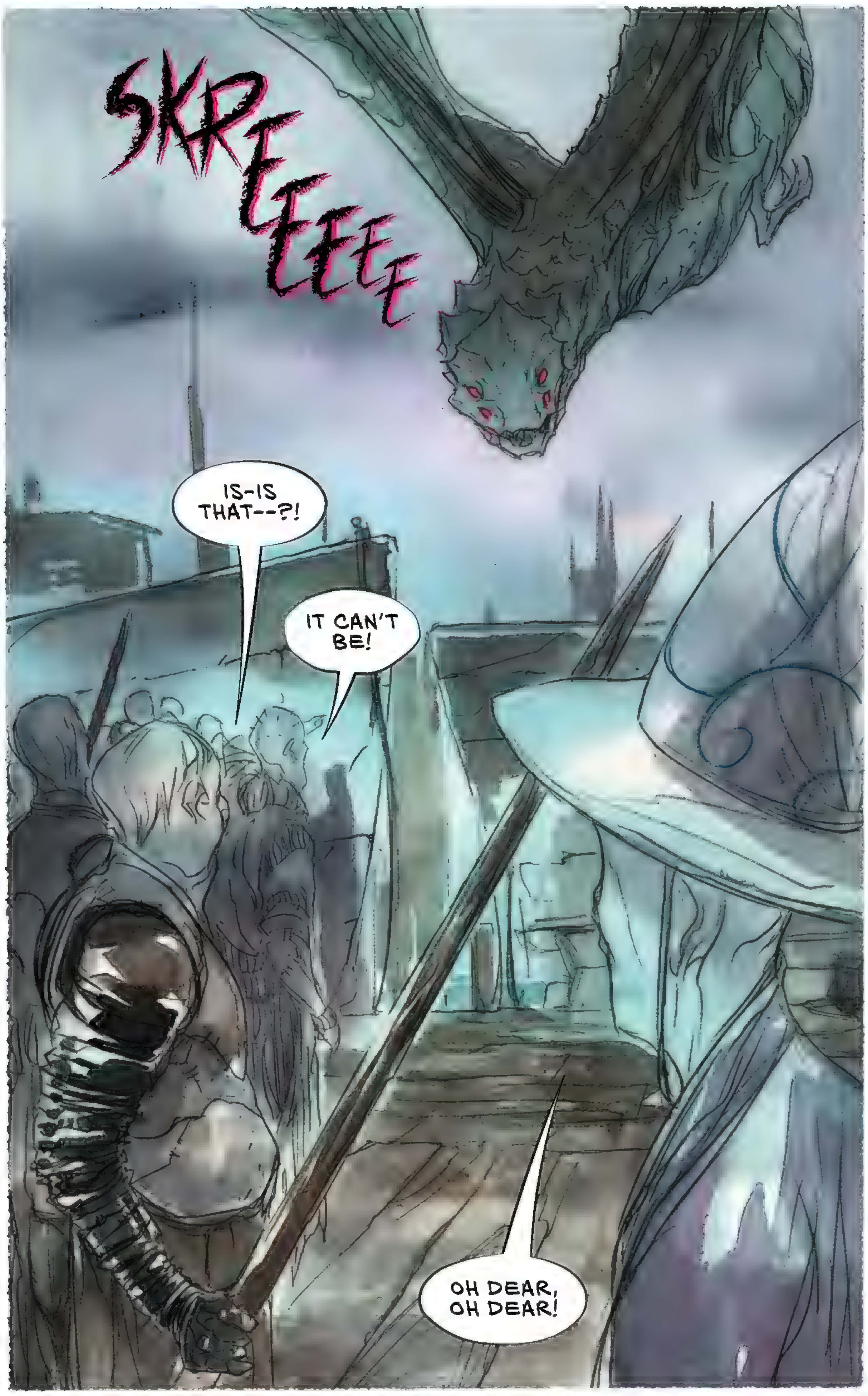
PLOOOSH
AAHHH!
FRA! FRA!
HELDA?!
WE GOT TROUBLE, CAPTAIN! BIG TROUBLE!
WEREWHALES!

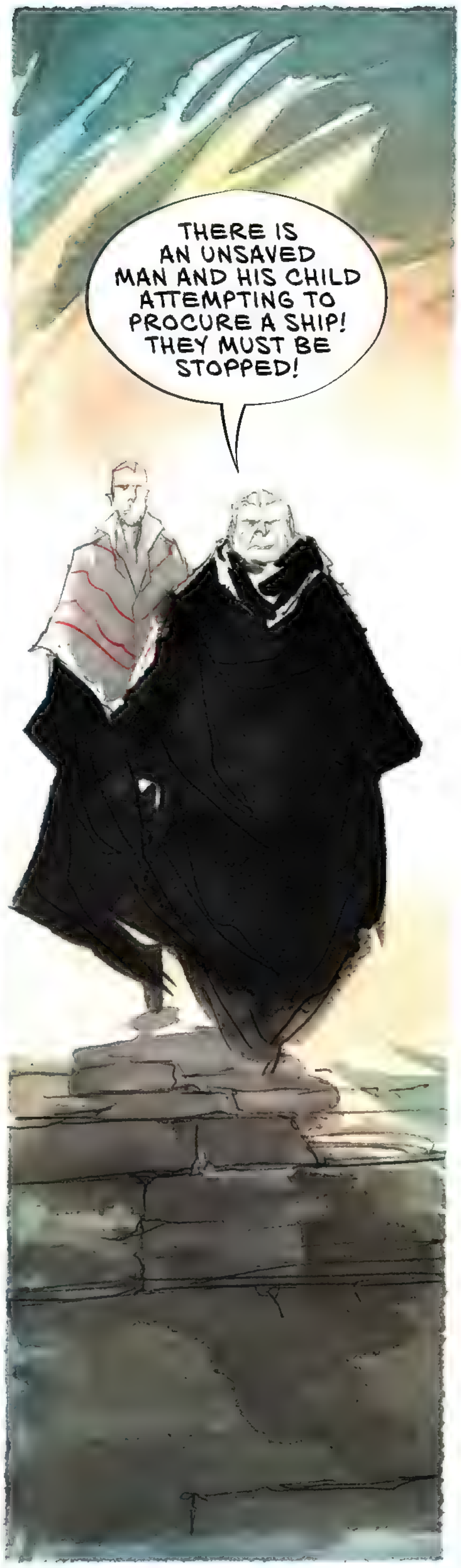
SKREEEEE
MOTHER IS GREAT…
MOTHER IS WATCHING…
…MOTHER IS *HERE!*
WHO WERE THEY?
NO ONE OF CONSEQUENCE, MOTHER. AN UNSAVED MAN AND HIS CHILD. APPEARS HE HAD CONSIDERABLE CONTRABAND HIDDEN ON-SITE, INCLUDING A FUNCTIONING LASER RIFLE.

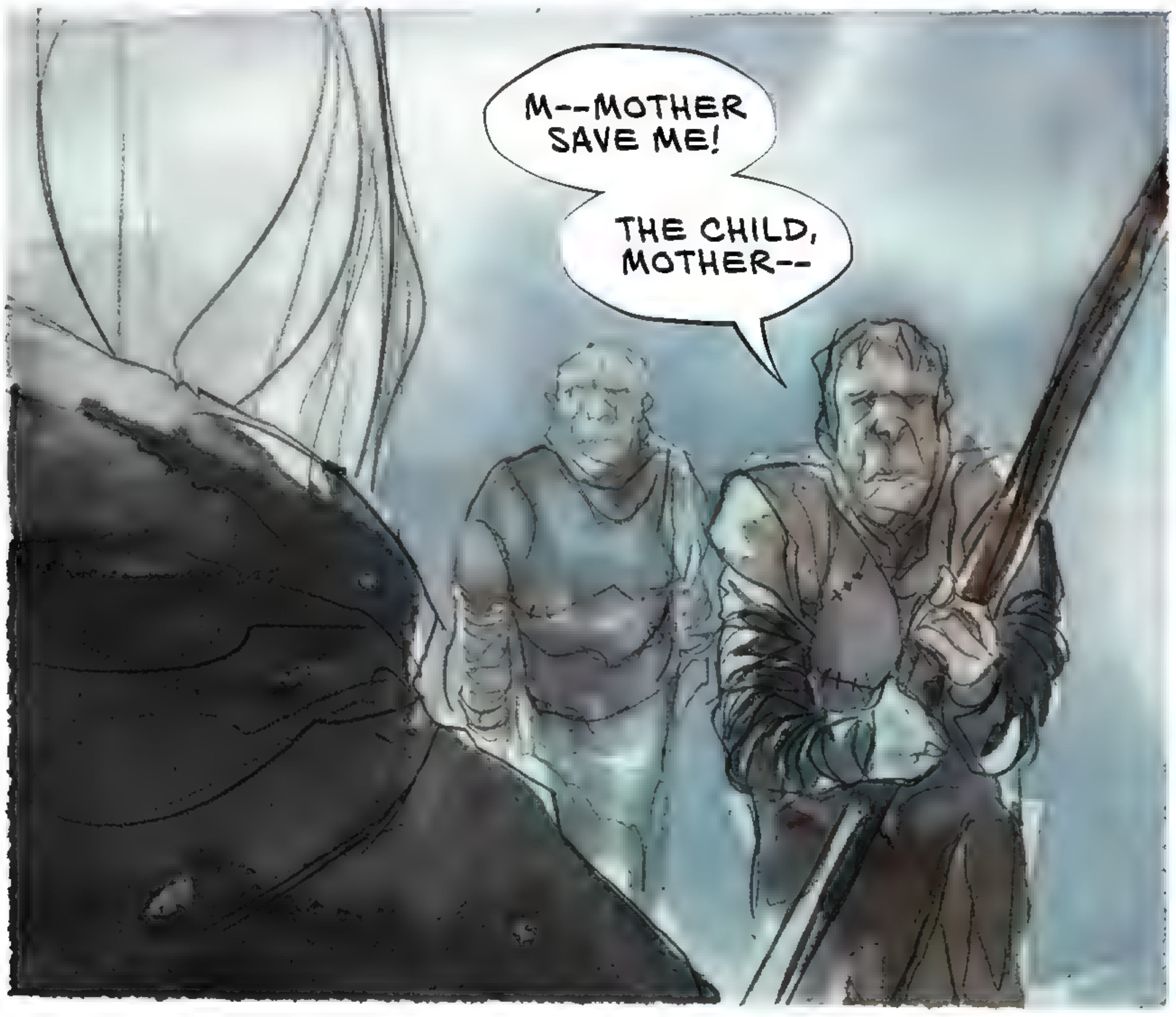
BEING ABLE TO CONCEAL A RIFLE IS ONE THING, BUT THE HOUND--THIS PET-BOT--IT COULD NOT HAVE BEEN HIDING HERE LONG, THE MILITIA'S DETECTION SPELLS WOULD HAVE FOUND IT.
INDEED, MOTHER. WE FOUND AN IMPACT CRATER NOT FAR FROM HERE. IT APPEARS TO BE WHERE THE BOT LANDED. SCORCH MARKS ARE FRESH.
I DON'T BELIEVE THE ROBOT LANDED HERE RANDOMLY. THESE PEOPLE, THIS MAN AND CHILD...THEY MUST BE *SOMEONE.*
SHOW ME!
DADDY?
DAD? WHAT ARE--
THERE WILL BE MORE! WE HAVE TO GO! WE CAN'T STAY HERE, MILA!

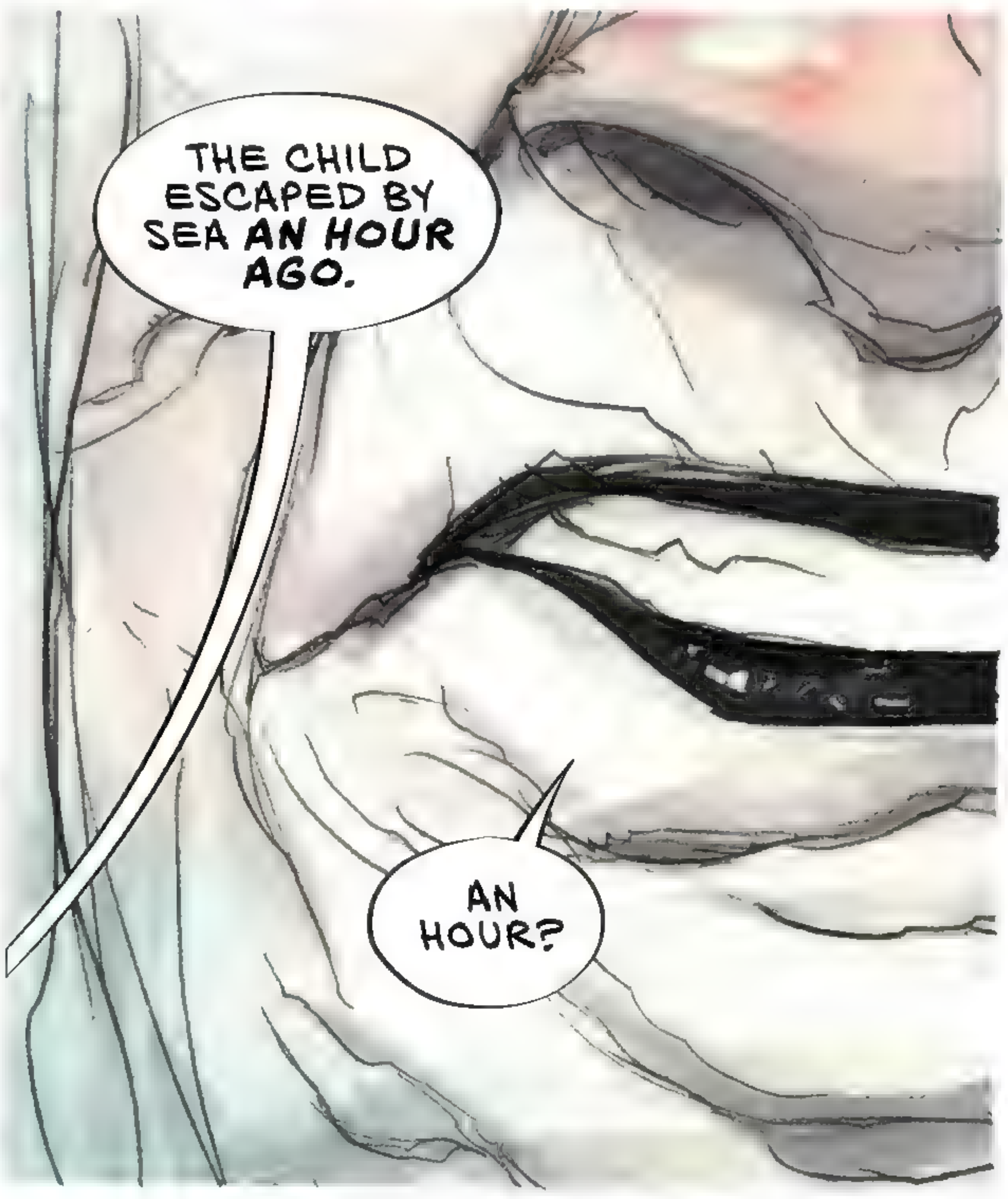
DAD, I--WHERE WILL WE GO?
SAMPSON ISN'T SAFE. NOT NOW. WE HAVE TO LEAVE. WE HAVE TO GET **OFF-WORLD.**
OFF-WORLD?! BUT DAD, WE CAN'T GET OFF-WORLD! THERE ARE NO SHIPS! AND--
THERE **ARE** SHIPS, MILA, IN THE BADLANDS. ***ILLEGAL SHIPS...*** IT WON'T BE EASY, BUT IF WE CAN MAKE IT TO THE PORTS I KNOW SOMEONE WHO CAN HELP US.
THE WATER! THEY ARE ATTEMPTING TO ESCAPE BY SEA!
I WILL SEND A MESSAGE. MY MEN WILL LOCK THE PORTS DOWN!
NEVER MIND! I'M ***GOING MYSELF,*** FOLLOW IF YOU CAN!
SKREEEEE

MOTHER, I'VE NO DOUBT THIS ROBOT IS AS IMPORTANT AS YOU SAY, BUT SHOULD WE LET THE MILITIA HERE ON SAMPSON DEAL WITH ITS CAPTURE?
SURELY YOUR ATTENTION IS BETTER SERVED LOOKING FOR THE UGC REBELS BEFORE THEY ATTACK AGAIN?
GENERAL VIX?
YES, MOTHER?
HOW ABOUT YOU LET **ME** WORRY ABOUT WHERE MY ATTENTION IS "BETTER SERVED"?
JUST BECAUSE I LET YOU DRINK MY BLOOD, DOES NOT MEAN I LET YOU ***SHARE*** IN MY COMMAND. ***UNDERSTOOD?***
Y--YES, MOTHER. OF COURSE.


SKREEEEEE
IS-IS THAT--?!
IT CAN'T BE!
OH DEAR, OH DEAR!


THERE IS AN UNSAVED MAN AND HIS CHILD ATTEMPTING TO PROCURE A SHIP! THEY MUST BE STOPPED!

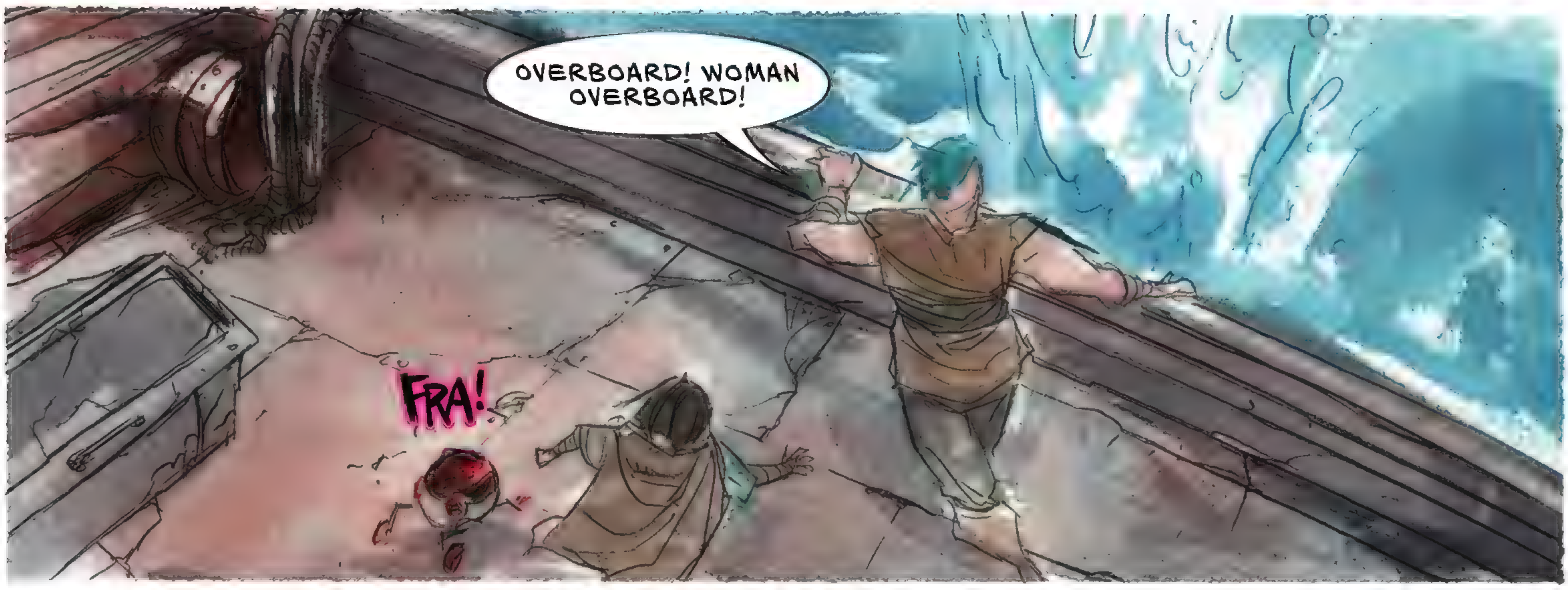

M--MOTHER SAVE ME!
THE CHILD, MOTHER--

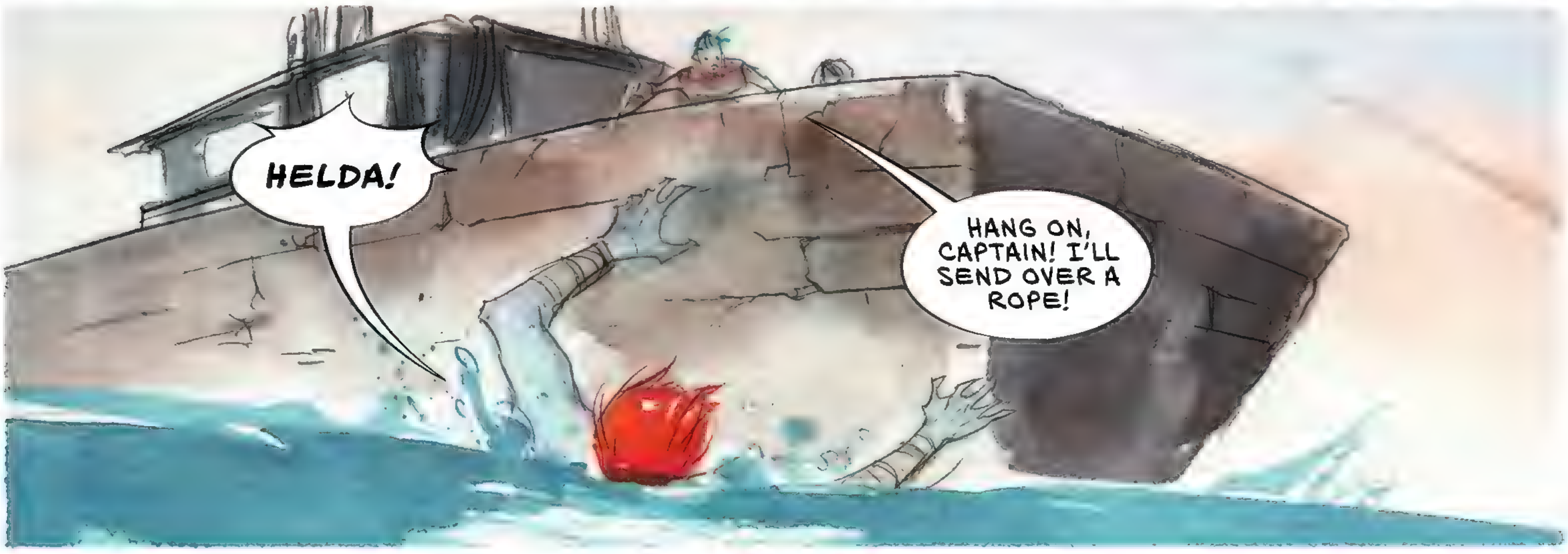

THE CHILD ESCAPED BY SEA AN HOUR AGO.
AN HOUR?

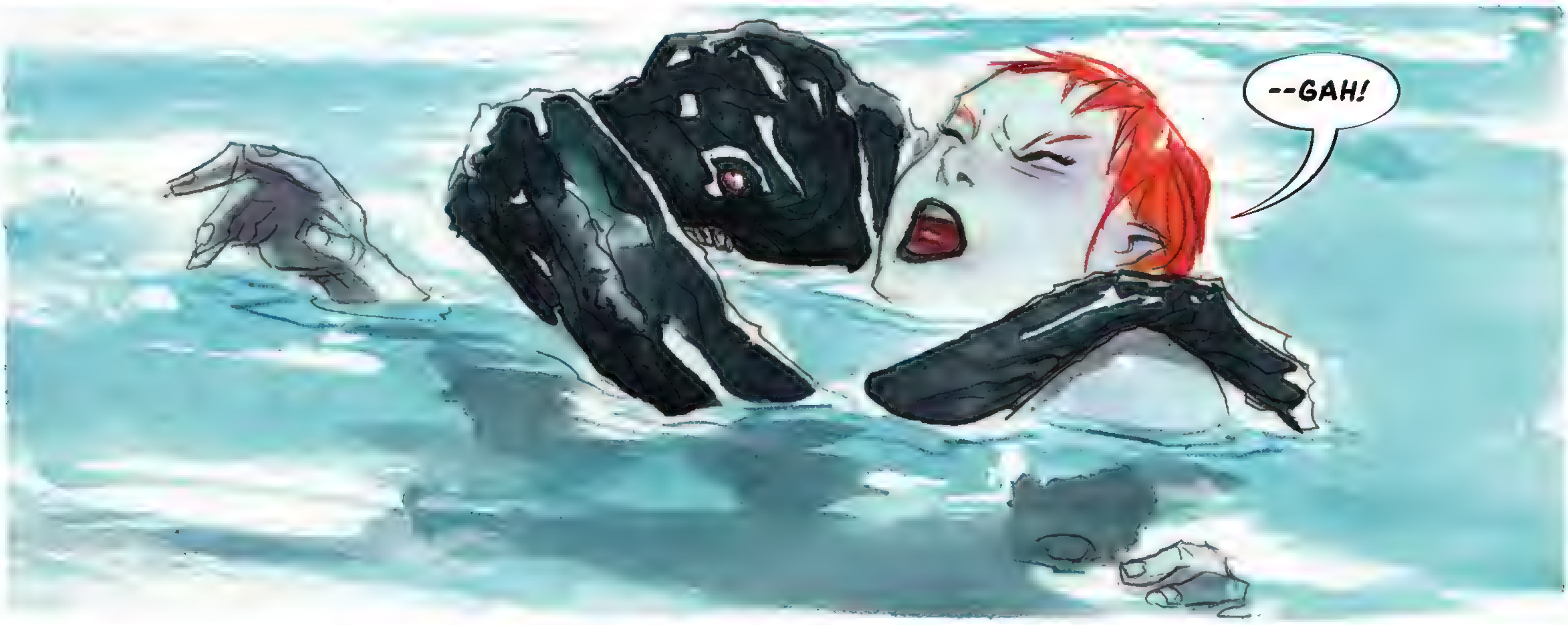
NOOOOO!
B-BUT, MOTHER--
WHAT?
THE MAN--THE UNSAVED MAN--WE HAVE HIM HERE... CAPTIVE.

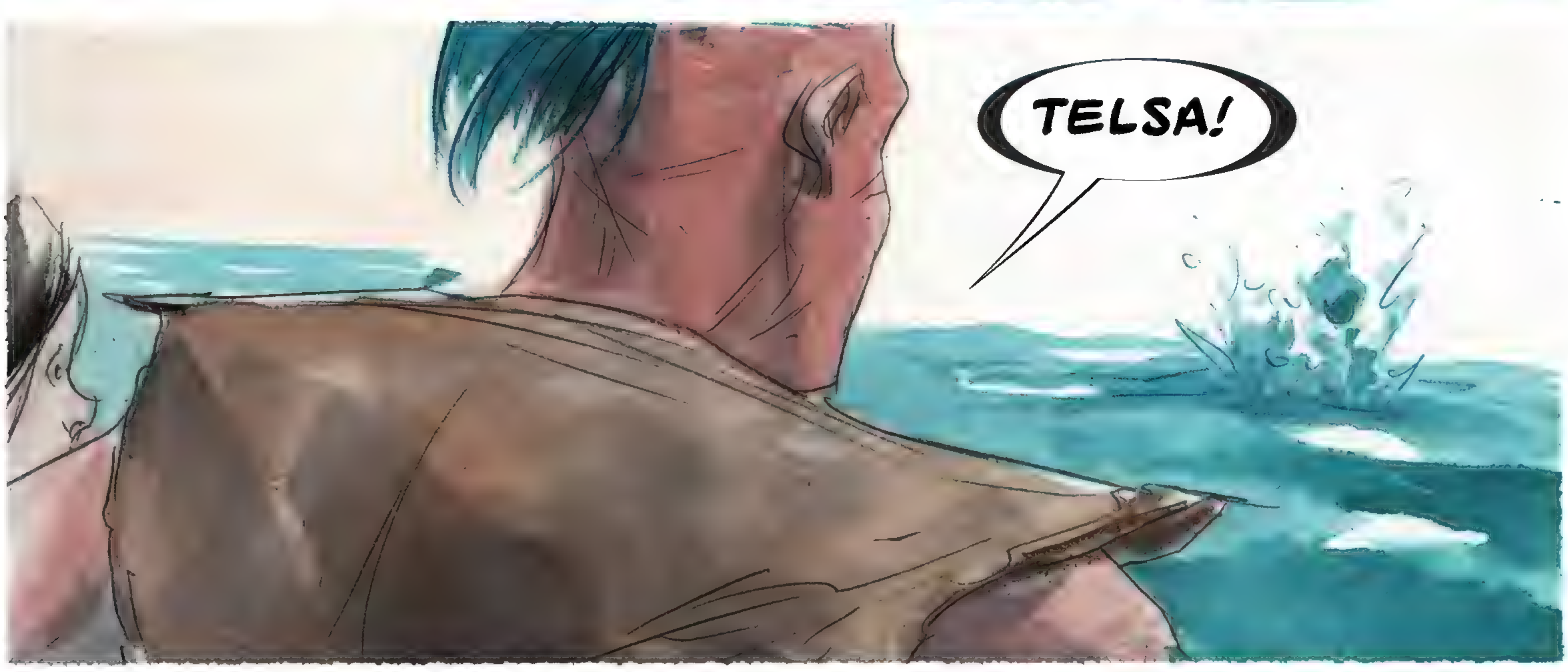
GUARD DOG THEM, BANDIT! HURRY!
FRA! FRA!
WHY AREN'T YOU ATTACKING THEM! MAKE ALL THOSE LASERS AND STUFF POP OUT OF YOUR BACK AND VAPORIZE THEM!
FRA!
FRA! FRA!
OH, GREAT! NOW WHAT ARE WE--
--AH!

KZOWW
AHHH!
COME ON, KID! WE NEED TO GET YOU BELOW DECK! WE JUST NEED TO OUTLAST THESE THINGS UNTIL SUNRISE!
DON'T CALL ME KID!
YOU KNOW, YOU **REALLY** REMIND ME OF YOUR MOTHER!
FRA! FRA!
COME ON! BELOW! GO!
--SHIT!
HELDA!
NO!


OVERBOARD! WOMAN OVERBOARD!
FRA!


HELDA!
HANG ON, CAPTAIN! I'LL SEND OVER A ROPE!

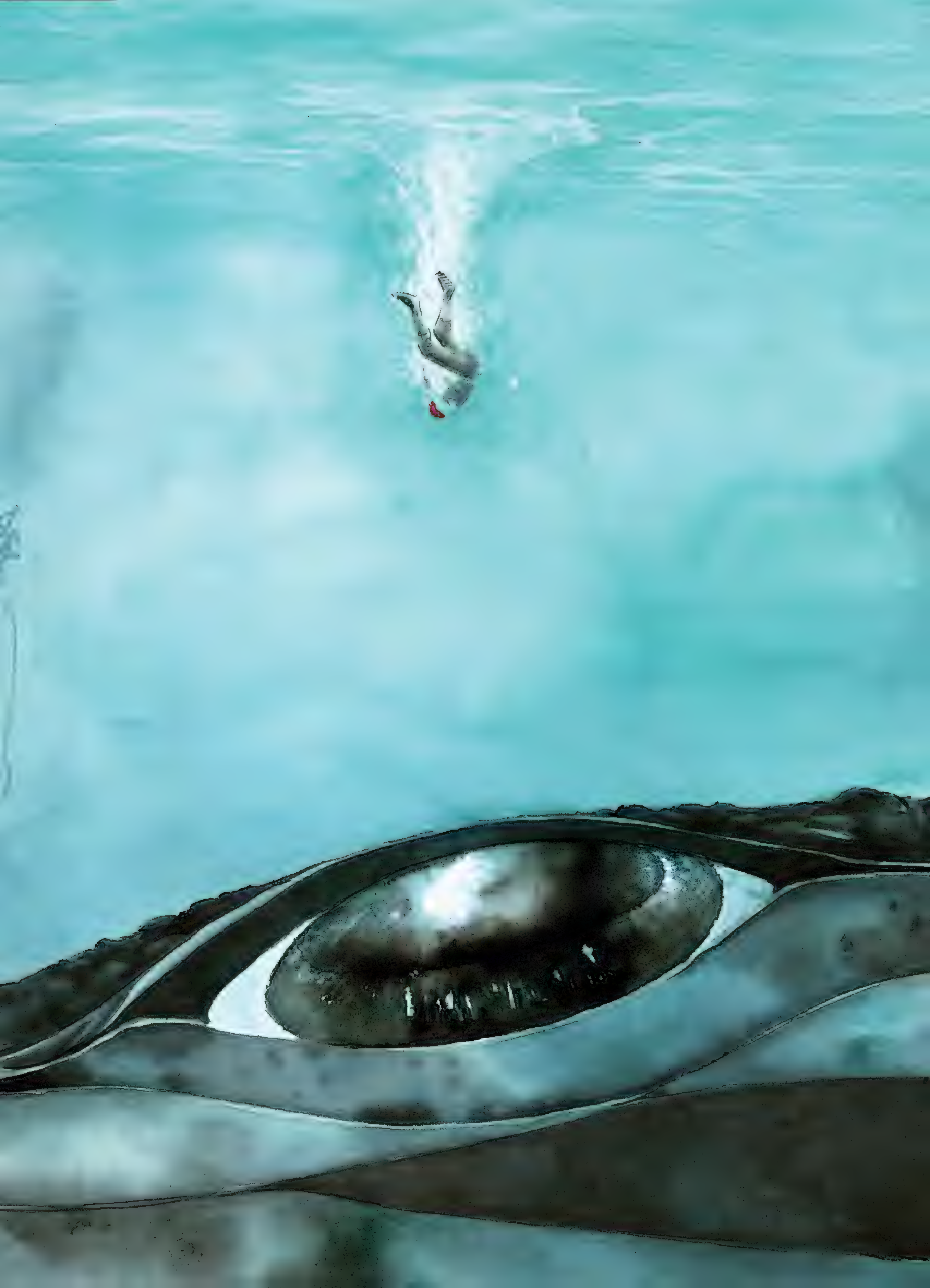

--GAH!


TELSA!

--COME ON, QUIT DRAGGING YOUR FEET! INTO THE HOLDING PENS.
DINNER TIME!
OH, SHIT...WE ARE DONE, MAN.
SLURRRP

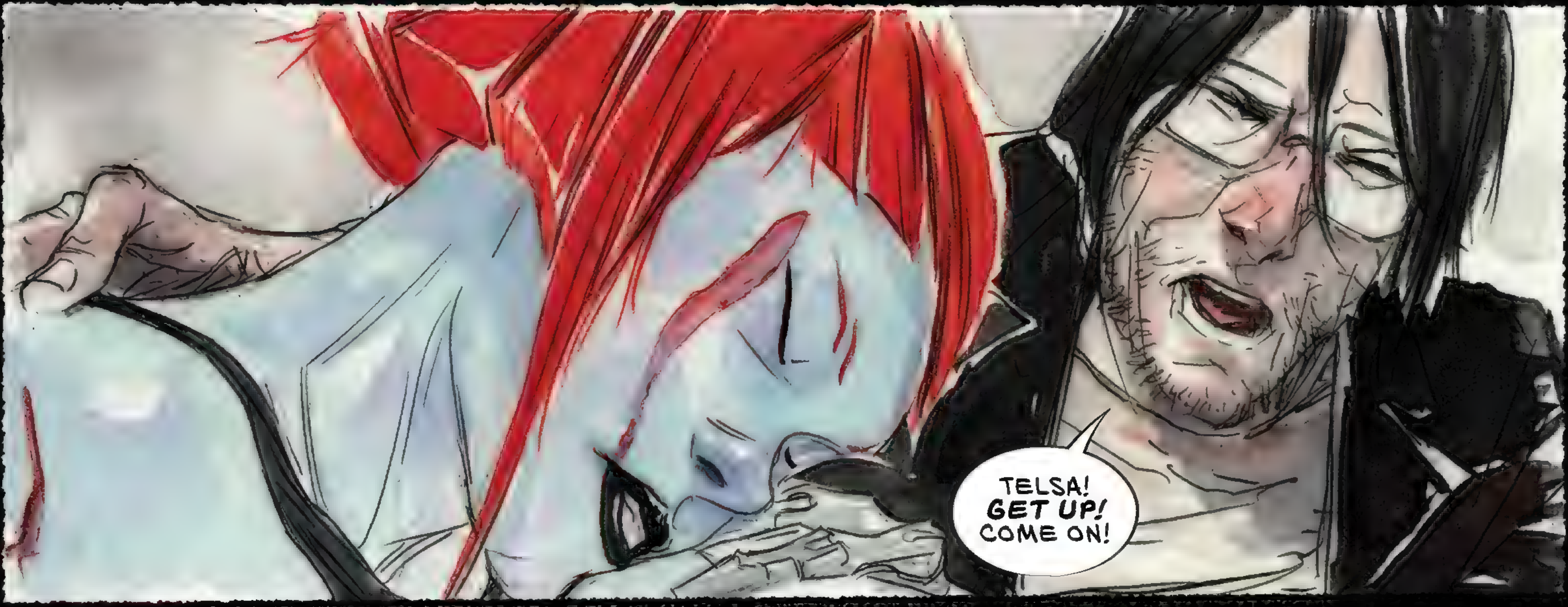
EFFIE?!

7

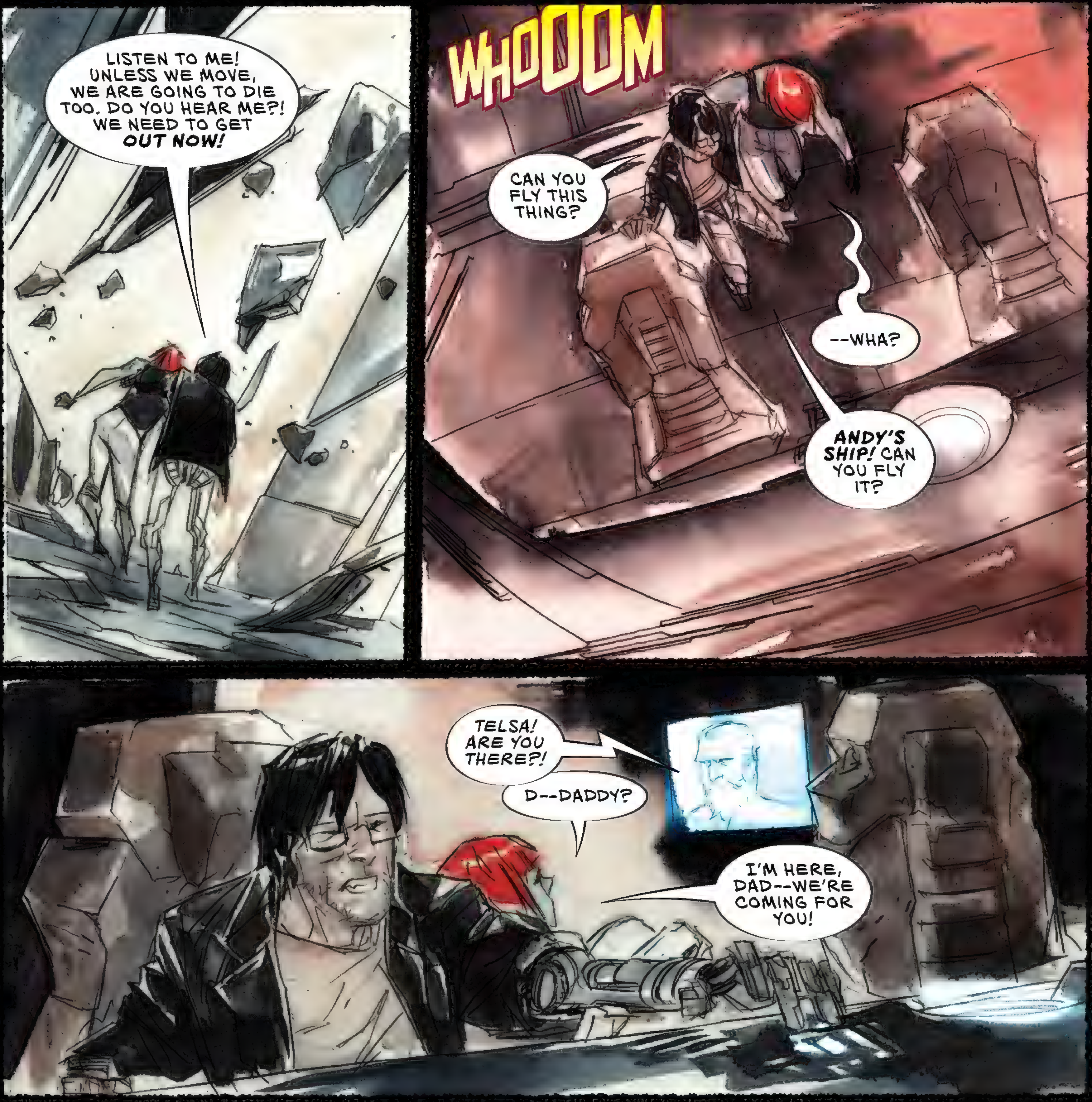


--GAH!
CAPTAIN! CAPTAIN, HOLD ON I'M GOING TO--
GLRRP!

GASP! FUCK!
"TELSA! TELSA, WE HAVE TO GET OUT OF HERE!"


TELSA! **GET UP!** COME ON!

TEN YEARS AGO. THE SECOND DESCENDER ATTACK.


LISTEN TO ME! UNLESS WE MOVE, WE ARE GOING TO DIE TOO. DO YOU HEAR ME?! WE NEED TO GET **OUT NOW!**
WHOOOM
CAN YOU FLY THIS THING?
--WHA?
ANDY'S SHIP! CAN YOU FLY IT?
TELSA! ARE YOU THERE?!
D--DADDY?
I'M HERE, DAD--WE'RE COMING FOR YOU!

CHOOOM
DAD! JUMP! GET OUT OF THERE!
I--I LOVE YOU, SWEETHEART.
FWASH
DADDY!
--DADDY...

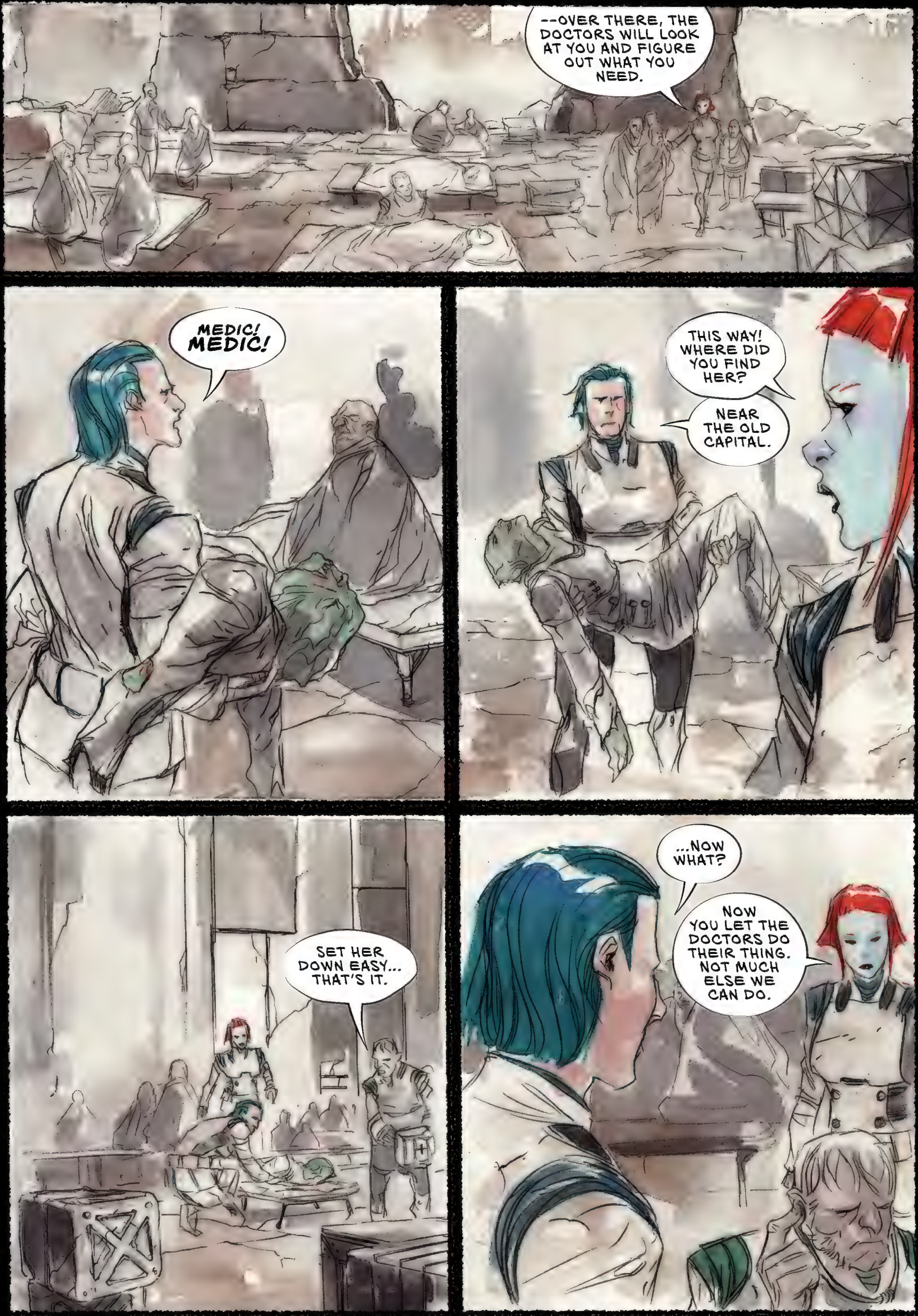
KZZZT
AH, YOU'RE FINALLY AWAKE!
QUON?
WHERE THE HELL **ARE** WE?
DON'T YOU-- I RESCUED YOU-- WELL, I RESCUED **US**--I FLEW HERE, SEEMS THE BEST SPOT TO START.
BUT WHERE IS **HERE,** QUON? WHERE DID YOU TAKE US?
WE ARE **HOME,** TELSA...

"...THIS IS *NIYRATA.*"
NIYRATA... BUT THIS CAN'T BE--
IT'S LIKE THIS EVERYWHERE. ALL OVER THE UGC. THEY HIT EVERY WORLD-- WORSE THAN BEFORE.
WHAT ABOUT THE UGC?!
UGC... TELSA, YOU DON'T GET IT-- IT'S GONE--THE UGC--EVERYTHING--IT'S ALL GONE.
THIS IS IT NOW.

BUT IT'S GOING TO BE OKAY. I ALMOST HAVE THE ***SHIFTDRIVE*** FIXED ON ANDY'S SHIP! WE CAN GET MOVING SOON.
GET MOVING? WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT, QUON?
TIM! WE CAN GO AFTER TIM-21! WE CAN FIGURE OUT WHERE THE DESCENDERS TOOK HIM AND WE CAN--WELL WE CAN ***FIND THEM!***
FIND THEM?! ARE YOU INSANE?
LOOK AT ME, TELSA-- I'M--I'M NOT EVEN ***A MAN*** ANYMORE.
WHAT ELSE AM I GOING TO DO? I NEED TO FIND THE DESCENDERS-- I NEED TO UNDERSTAND.

I AM DONE WITH ALL THAT! WITH DESCENDERS AND QUESTS AND TIM-21-- DONE! THERE WILL BE SURVIVORS--IT'S ***MY DUTY*** TO HELP THEM!
DIDN'T YOU HEAR ME?! ***THE UGC IS FINISHED!*** THERE IS NOTHING LEFT. YOU ARE NOT A SOLDIER ANYMORE! YOU ***HAVE*** NO DUTY!
I AM ALWAYS A SOLDIER, QUON. UNLIKE YOU-- ***I KNOW WHAT I AM.*** I'VE ***ALWAYS KNOWN.***
YOU DON'T HAVE TO PROVE ANYTHING TO YOUR DADDY ANYMORE, TELSA. HE'S ***GONE.***
WHAP
--I DON'T THINK SO. NOT THIS TIME. THINGS HAVE ***CHANGED.*** I'M NOT ***YOUR PUNCHING BAG*** ANYMORE.
AND I'M NOT YOUR BABYSITTER ANYMORE. IF YOU WANT TO GO OFF ON SOME FOOL'S QUEST, GO FOR IT.
...I HAVE ***REAL*** WORK TO DO. ***REAL PEOPLE*** WHO NEED ME.

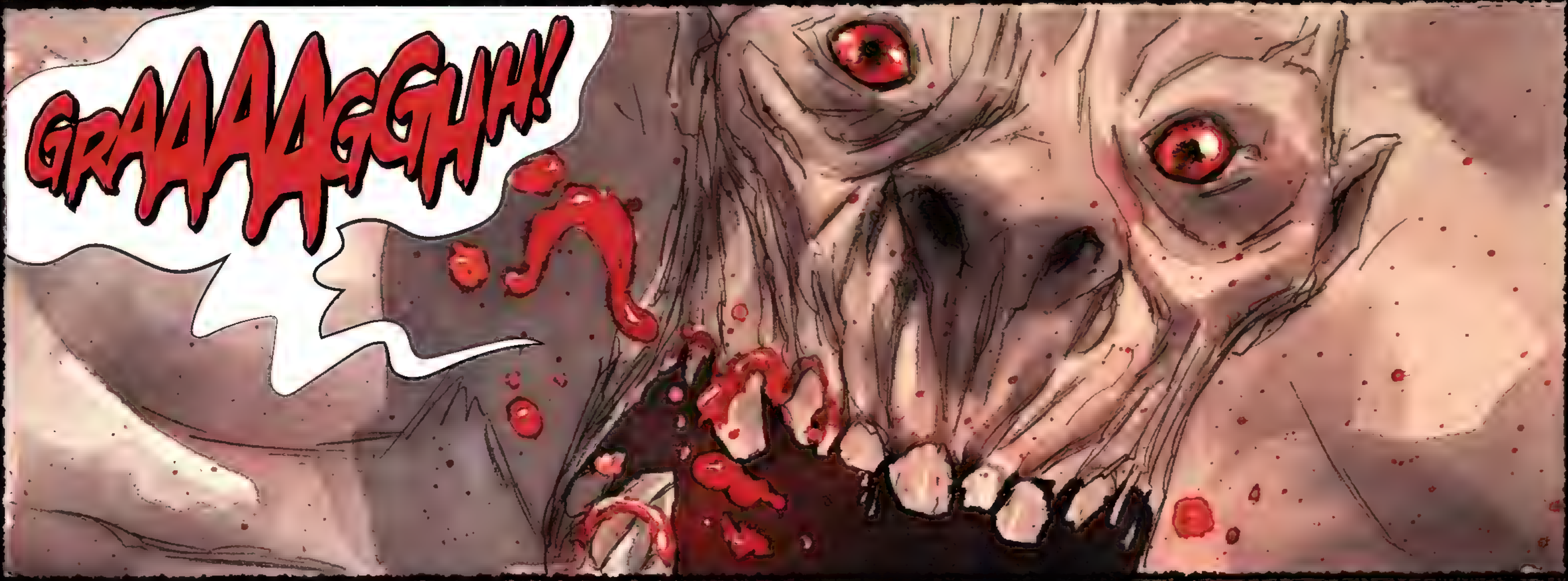
EIGHT YEARS AGO. THE NIYRATA SURVIVAL CAMPS.


--OVER THERE, THE DOCTORS WILL LOOK AT YOU AND FIGURE OUT WHAT YOU NEED.
MEDIC! MEDIC!
THIS WAY! WHERE DID YOU FIND HER?
NEAR THE OLD CAPITAL.
SET HER DOWN EASY... THAT'S IT.
...NOW WHAT?
NOW YOU LET THE DOCTORS DO THEIR THING. NOT MUCH ELSE WE CAN DO.

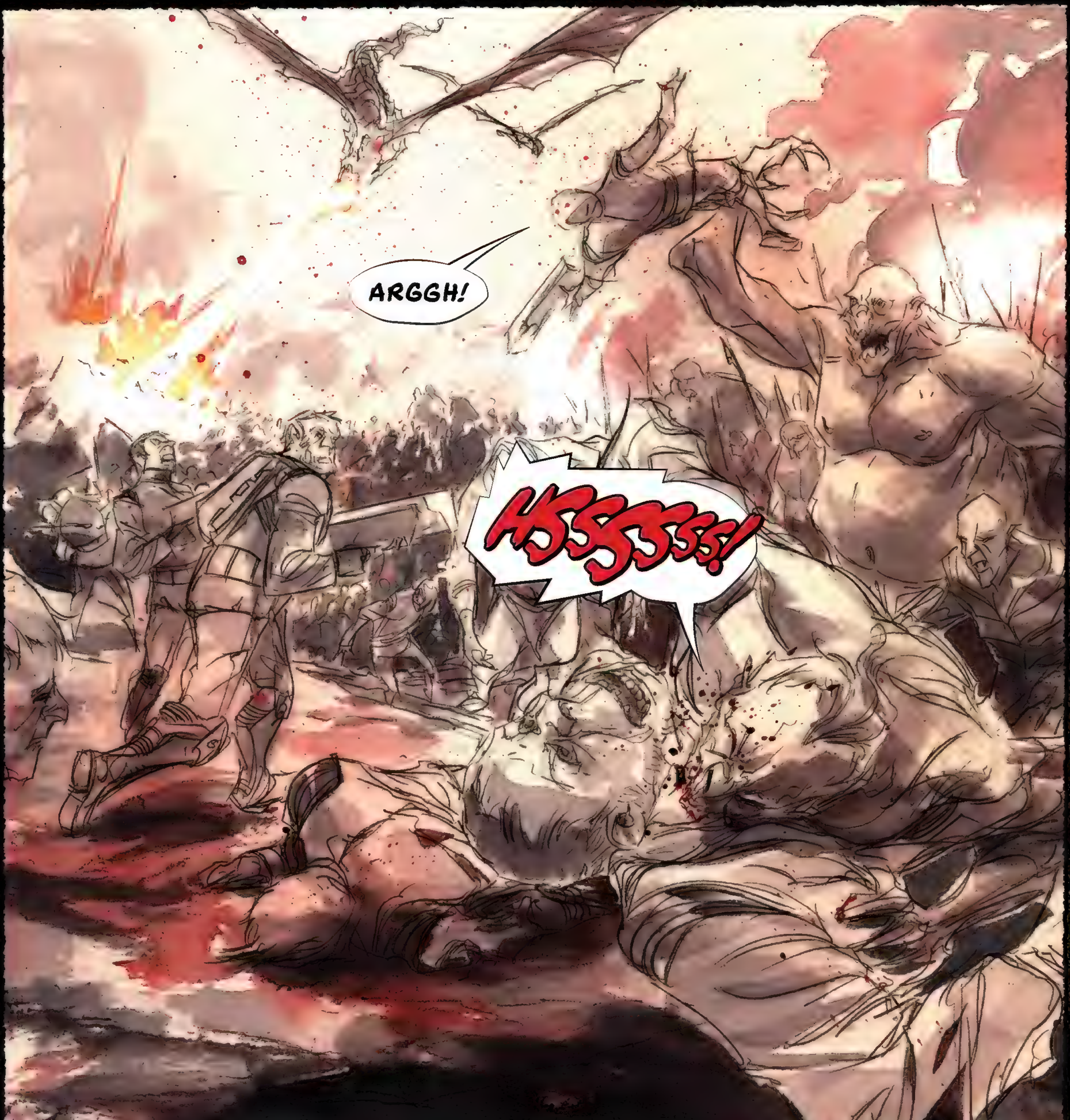
OH-- YOU'RE UGC TOO?
HUH--OH, YEAH. TELSA. CAPTAIN, TENTH SQUADRON.
EXCUSE ME, CAPTAIN. I DIDN'T REALIZE YOU WERE AN OFFICER.
I'M NOT REALLY...NOT ANYMORE. NONE OF US ARE.
ONCE UGC, ALWAYS UGC. ONCE MY CAPTAIN, ALWAYS MY CAPTAIN.
THANK YOU...AND YOU ARE?
PRIVATE SECOND CLASS, HELDA DONNIS.
NICE TO MEET YOU, HELDA.
WERE YOU HERE? WHEN THE DESCENDERS ATTACKED, I MEAN?
I WAS. STATIONED IN THE NAVAL UNIT OFF GINTA POINT.
MY ENTIRE SHIP CAPSIZED IN THE SHOCKWAVES. I WAS THE ONLY ONE WHO MADE IT TO SHORE.

HAVE YOU HEARD ANYTHING ABOUT THE OUTER RIM SQUADRONS?
SO MANY OF THEM WERE OUT THERE WHEN IT HAPPENED. THERE COULD STILL BE A SIZABLE UGC FORCE IF WE COULD CONTACT THEM AND BRING THEM IN.
I JUST HEARD WEIRD RUMORS ABOUT THE RIM.
WEIRD RUMORS? LIKE WHAT?
STRANGE THINGS HAPPENING OUT THERE. HEARD THERE WAS SOME KIND OF ROGUE ARMY SEIZING SOME OF THE OUTER RIMS. A MILITIA OF SOME KIND.
AND WELL... I HEARD THEY GOT MONSTERS WITH THEM.
MONSTERS? WHAT DO YOU MEAN, MONSTERS?
PROBABLY NONSENSE. BUT JUST WHAT I HEARD.

SO, *UH*... I COULD DEFINITELY USE A HAND AT THE SHELTER. I MEAN, IF YOU HAVE NOWHERE ELSE TO--
IT WOULD BE AN HONOR TO SERVE UNDER YOU, CAPTAIN.
GREAT, BUT CAN WE STOP WITH THE SALUTING STUFF?
OF COURSE, CAPTAIN.
...MONSTERS.


GRAAAAGGHH!

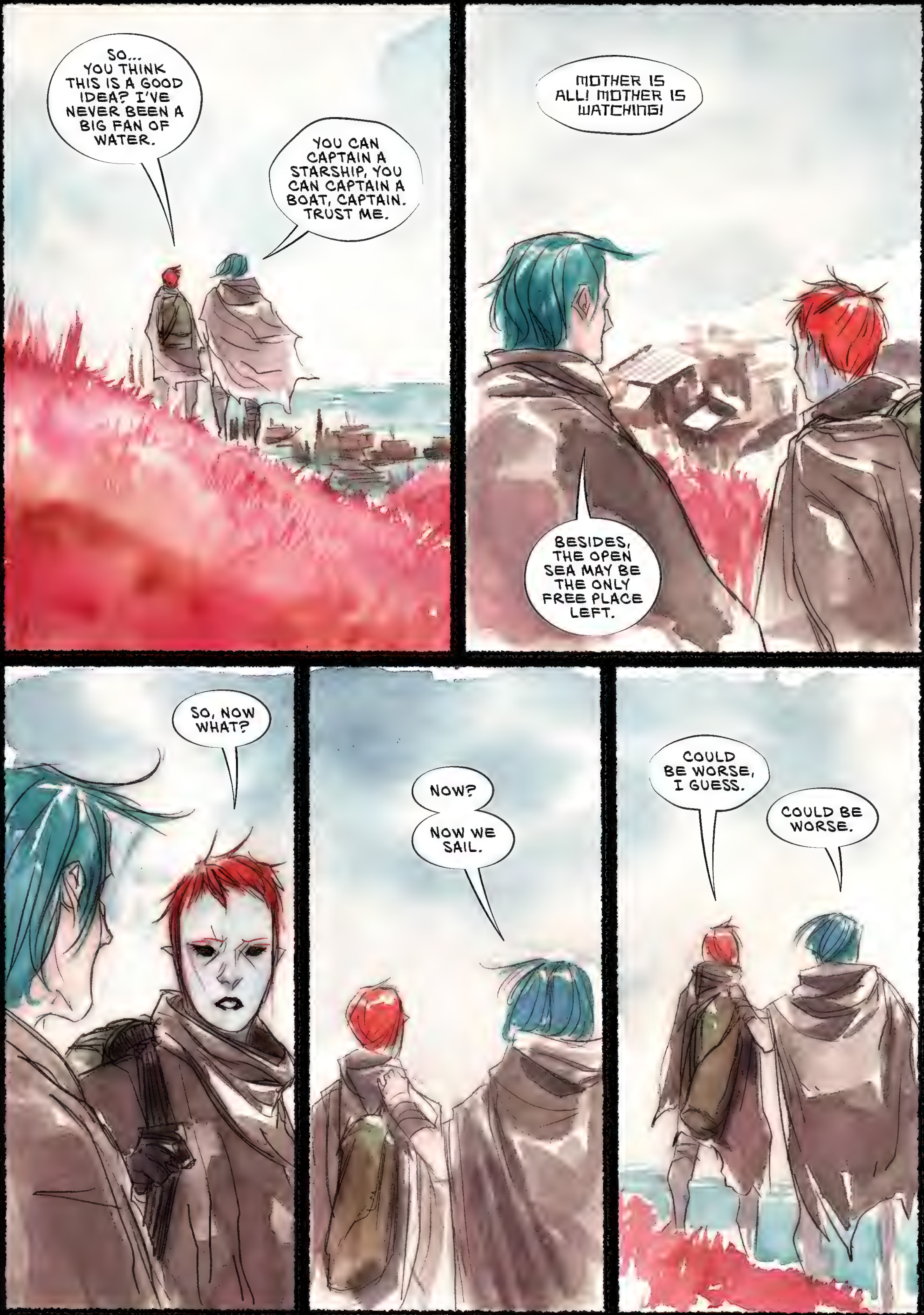
SIX YEARS AGO. THE BATTLE OF NIYRATA.

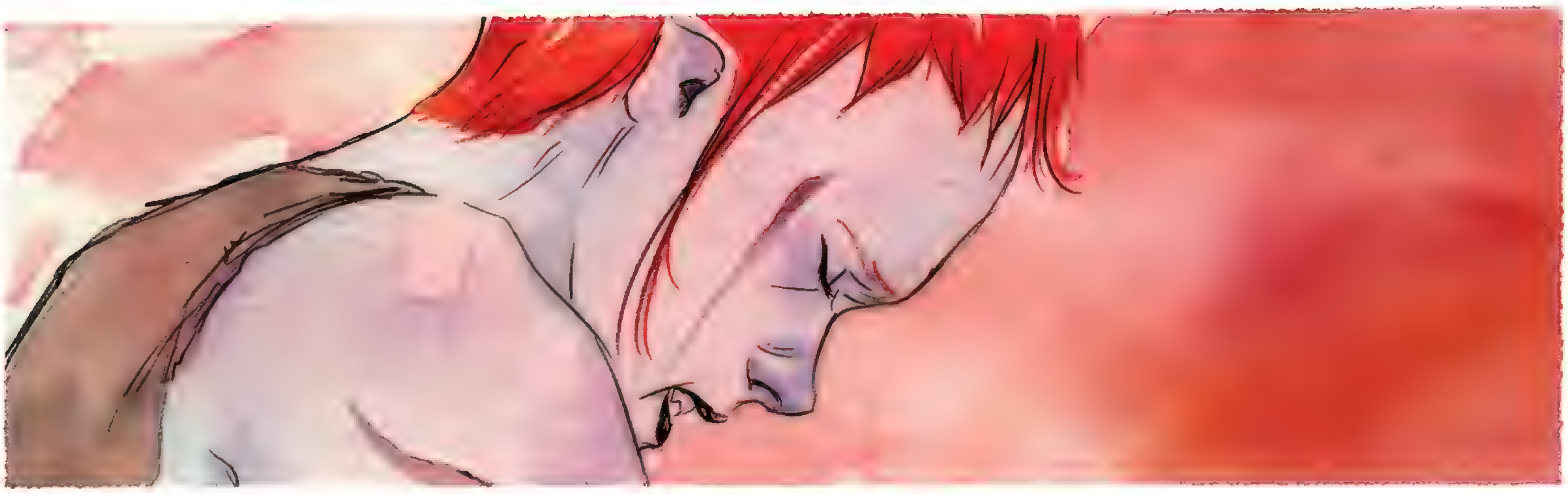

ARGGH!
HSSSSSS!

THIS IS-- THIS IS *INSANE!*
THEY ARE GOING TO TAKE THE PLANET, CAPTAIN. WE CAN'T HOLD THEM BACK MUCH LONGER!
WHAT IS THAT?
THEY--THEY WERE GIVING THEM OUT AT THE ENCAMPMENT. IN CASE THE VAMPS GET YOU--A LAST RESORT.
YOU REALLY THINK WHAT THEY ARE SAYING IS TRUE, HELDA...THAT IF THEY BITE YOU--?
SEEN IT WITH MY OWN EYES, CAPTAIN. IT'S TRUE. DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU, BUT THERE IS NO WAY I AM GOING TO BE TURNED INTO ONE'A THOSE THINGS.
WELL, WE AREN'T THERE YET.
YOU GOT A PLAN, CAPTAIN?
AS MUCH AS I HATE TO ADMIT IT, YOU'RE RIGHT. THIS WORLD IS GONE. WE CAN'T STOP THEM. BUT WE CAN GET AWAY, YOU AND I...
BUT, CAPTAIN...OUR DUTY...THE UGC.
IT'S TIME WE BOTH ADMITTED THAT THE UGC IS DEAD AND GONE, HELDA. WE NEED TO LOOK OUT FOR OURSELVES NOW...THAT'S ALL WE HAVE LEFT.
WILL--WILL YOU COME WITH ME, HELDA?
ONCE MY CAPTAIN, ALWAYS MY CAPTAIN.

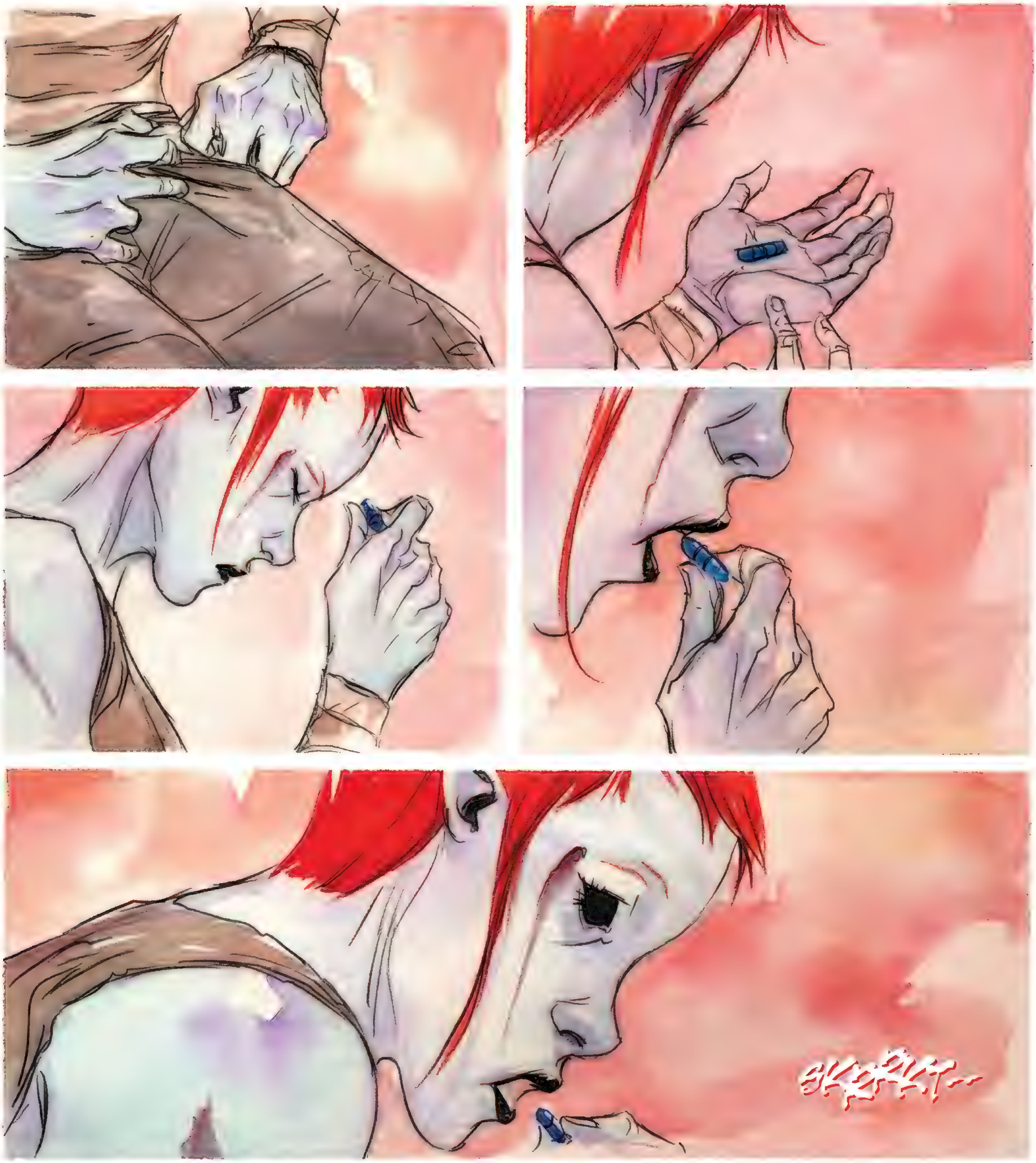
WHERE WILL WE GO?
I DON'T KNOW YET, BUT WE ARE **GETTING OFF NIYRATA.** THERE ARE STILL A FEW FREIGHTERS DOWN BY THE OLD CAPITAL PORTS. IF WE CAN MAKE IT--
HSSSS!
SHIT!
IT WILL GET BACK UP, AND IT **HAS OUR SCENTS** NOW-- RUN, CAPTAIN-- **RUN!**
--GO GO GO! TO THE SHIP YARDS!

FIVE YEARS AGO. SAMPSON.


SO... YOU THINK THIS IS A GOOD IDEA? I'VE NEVER BEEN A BIG FAN OF WATER.
YOU CAN CAPTAIN A STARSHIP, YOU CAN CAPTAIN A BOAT, CAPTAIN. TRUST ME.
MOTHER IS ALL! MOTHER IS WATCHING!
BESIDES, THE OPEN SEA MAY BE THE ONLY FREE PLACE LEFT.
SO, NOW WHAT?
NOW?
NOW WE SAIL.
COULD BE WORSE, I GUESS.
COULD BE WORSE.



NOW. INSIDE THE BELLY OF THE WHALE.



SPLURT
HELDA?!
HOW THE HELL DID YOU--?
ONCE MY CAPTAIN, ALWAYS MY CAPTAIN...

YOU DID IT!
FRA! FRA!
AY, LITTLE ONE...I DID IT.

SO, I TOTALLY PILOTED THE SHIP WHEN YOU TWO WERE DOWN THERE.
IT WAS ON **AUTO-PILOT.**
SO? I STILL KEPT AN EYE ON THINGS. I THINK I EARNED **A RANK.**
RANK? WHATTA YOU MEAN?
LIKE, YOU'RE SHIP CAPTAIN, HELDA IS FIRST MATE. SO I SHOULD GET A RANK TOO!
DON'T PUSH IT, KID.
WELL, **SHE DID** HANDLE HERSELF WELL AGAINST THE WEREWHALES, CAPTAIN.
FINE. YOU CAN BE SECOND MATE.
SECOND MATE MILA TAVERS! I LIKE THAT!
SO, NOW WHAT?
NOW? NOW **WE SAIL.**
FIRST THE SEA... THEN THE STARS.

8

SAMPSON. THE DEEP DARK WOODS.
HOW YA FIGURE, NED?
--OSTRAKON?! ARE YOU KIDDING ME?! THE VAMPS THERE ARE SO FECKING STUCK-UP! BUNCH OF BLOOD-SNOBS IS WHAT THEY ARE!
I HEAR THEY DON'T EVEN FEED OFF'A ANIMALS! ONLY HUMANS FOR THEM! *PFFT!* LA DEE DA!
THEY THINK JUST 'CAUSE THE FIRST VAMPS CAME FROM THERE, THEY'RE BETTER THAN THE REST OF US! "MORE PURE." IT'S BULLSHIT, TOBY! TRUST ME, MAN, YOU DON'T WANNA TRANSFER TO OSTRAKON!
WELL, IT'S GOT TO BE BETTER THAN THIS SHIT, NED! I MEAN, YOU DON'T SEE THE OSTRAKON VAMPS GETTING STUCK ON BONE DUTY OUT IN THE ASS END OF NOWHERE!
WELL, SOMEONE'S GOTTA BURY 'EM! IT'S THE RULES!
WHERE YOU GOING?!
GOTTA TAKE A LEAK.

I DON'T KNOW. YOU ASK ME, SAMPSON AIN'T SO BAD, YA KNOW? MILITIA HERE HAS BENEFITS AND WE GET WEEKENDS OFF. COULD BE WORSE.
I KNOW IT, JAKE. SOME VAMPS ALWAYS WANT MORE. IT'S THIS YOUNGER GENERATION...I TELL YOU, THEY'RE SO DAMNED *ENTITLED!*
SNIFF SNIFF
WHAT IS IT?
BLOOD. SMELL BLOOD.

YO! TOBY! YOU OKAY?!
HE'S BEEN GONE A WHILE.
IT'S VAMP BLOOD I SMELL. YOU GUYS DON'T SMELL IT?!
GOT A COLD. CAN'T SMELL ANYTHING!
MOTHER SAVE US!
TOBY!
--GKKT!

--ABOMINATIONS.

WHAT-- WHO--?!
WHO AM I? I AM A SERVANT OF THE ONLY **TRUE GOD**, YOU WALKING ATROCITY. I AM **THE LAST SCRAPPER...**
KANTO **THE BLOOD SCRAPPER!**

EFFIE!
HSSSSSSS!
--EFF! EFF, IT'S ME!
FORGET IT! SHE'S IN 'ER BLOOD-FRENZY, MATE!
--AKKT!
SSSSSSS!
EFF, STOP!

EFF! PLEASE! IT'S ME! I--I WAS HERE **WITH MILA!**
THAT-- THAT'S RIGHT, MILA! I KNOW YOU REMEMBER-- ***OUR LITTLE GIRL***--SHE'S IN TROUBLE, EFF.
COME ON, MILA NEEDS US. FIGHT THIS! ***FIGHT IT!***
PLEASE-- I KNOW THAT YOU'RE STILL IN THERE. ***I KNOW IT.***
FIGHT IT, FIGHT IT FOR **MILA.**
SSSSHUT UP!
NO!

ENOUGH!
HSSSSS!
M--MOTHER!
MOTHER SAVE US!
THAT ONE...BRING HIM TO ME.

YOU--YOU HAD THE HOUND. THE HOUND WITH THE BACKWARDS TONGUE.
I'LL GIVE YOU **ONE CHANCE** TO SPEAK, LITTLE MAN, THEN I'LL **PULL** IT FROM YOU.
F--FUCK YOU.
OH, DEAR CHILD...IT DIDN'T HAVE TO HURT.
--GAAAARRGHH!

SO... THE GIRL IS YOURS, MY BEAUTIFUL GIRL?
IT'S OKAY, MY LOVE. IT'S OKAY, MY DEAR CHILD...I WILL REUNITE YOU WITH YOUR GIRL.
AND I'LL EVEN LET YOU BE THE ONE TO **FEED ON HER.**
NO!
OH YES, DOG. THE GIRL HAS THE HOUND. I WANT THE HOUND.
BUT THE GIRL ALSO HAS ***YOUR BLOOD...*** SO AS LONG AS I ***HAVE YOU,*** I CAN FIND HER.
THOUGH, HAVING SAID THAT...I DON'T REALLY NEED YOU AT ALL, DO I? JUST ***A DROP OF YOU.***
I'LL LET YOUR ***BELOVED EFFIE*** HAVE THE REST.

--HUURGH!
MOTHER?!
MY COVEN!
ON-- ON MATA! THEY ATTACK MY CITADEL! MY COVEN!
WHAT?! IMPOSSIBLE!

RALLY THE MILITIA! READY OUR VESSELS!
NO! YOU STAY HERE, VIX! FIND THAT GIRL!
FIND HER!
GENERAL?
BIND HIM. HE IS THE KEY TO FINDING THE GIRL. KEEP HIM ALIVE. THEN READY MY CHARIOT AND GATHER A GROUP OF OUR FINEST GUARD.
AND YOU... HALF-BREED, CAN I TRUST YOU?
YES, GENERAL. EVERYTHING FOR MOTHER. MY BLOOD IS HER BLOOD.

--UNGH!
NO!
MOTHERS! MOTHERS, I--I AM HERE!

I--I EVEN TRAVELED THROUGH THE MISTS. CAME AS QUICKLY AS I COULD!
OH NO... NO NO NO... MY MOTHERS... MY POWER...
THE BITCH TOOK THE BAIT... WE FINALLY GOT HER.

YOU KILLED MY MOTHERS!

DON'T WORRY...I AM COMING, MOTHERS...
I AM COMING!

YOU'RE UP EARLY, CAPTAIN.
ALMOST THERE. BE ON LAND IN AN HOUR.
I'M GOING TO LET THE POOR GIRL SLEEP AS LONG AS I CAN. SHE WAS UP ALL NIGHT AGAIN. BAD DREAMS, CRYING OUT.
POOR THING. SHE TRIES TO BE BRAVE, BUT SHE LOST HER PAPPY. SHE'S HURTING BAD.

BE CAREFUL WITH HER, HELDA.
WHAT'S THAT SUPPOSED TO MEAN?
DON'T GET TOO ATTACHED. WE GET HER OFF-WORLD AND THEN WE FIND WHEREVER BANDIT NEEDS US TO TAKE HER, THAT'S IT. I'M NOT LETTING MYSELF GET SUCKED BACK INTO ALL OF THIS.
BIT LATE FOR THAT, TELSA. WE ARE ALREADY SUCKED IN. AND LIKE IT OR NOT, THAT KIDDIE NEEDS US.

JUST REMEMBER, SHE'S NOT **OURS.**
YOU THINK I DON'T KNOW THAT?! DOESN'T MEAN I CAN'T CARE!
WE'RE NOT HER MOTHERS, HELDA! WE GET HER OFF-WORLD, THEN WE **DUMP HER!**

9

THE BLACK DESERT.
LAND OF DEAD THINGS.
MOTHERS?
MOTHERS?!

MOTHERS ARE GONE. GONE **FOREVER.**
YOU.
NO...
US.

YOU HAVE NO PLACE HERE, **WEAK THING.**
WE ALWAYS HAVE A PLACE.
I HAVE NO TIME FOR THIS. WHERE ARE THEY? WHERE IS ***THE COVEN?*** THEY WILL BE LOST IN THIS PLACE FOREVER IF I DON'T FIND THEM SOON.
LET ME SHOW US.
NO. NEVER AGAIN.
LET ME **SHOW US.** IT IS THE ONLY WAY.
BACK IS THE WAY FORWARD. YOU WILL SEE THIS... ***WE*** WILL SEE THIS...

...BACK.
SCREEEEEEE

DID YOU GET IT?
Y-YES.
WELL, HURRY THEN! BRING IT HERE!
CAN I DO IT? CAN I ADD THE FLOWERS?
KNOW YOUR PLACE, GIRL.
YOU'LL NEVER PRACTICE THE ART. WEAK THING. WRETCHED THING.

I'LL DO IT, MOTHERS.
YES. HURRY!
WHAT HAVE I TOLD YOU?! YOU DO NOT SPEAK TO THE MOTHERS! YOU ARE NOTHING. DO YOU UNDERSTAND?! NOTHING!
PLEASE, MOTHER--ALL I WANT IS TO BE ONE OF YOU.
ONE OF US? YOU ARE WEAK...NO MAGIC IN YOU. A WASTE.
SHOULD HAVE CUT YOU FROM MY BELLY AND BURIED YOU IN THE ICE.
THIS IS NOT HOW IT HAPPENED. NOT EXACTLY LIKE THIS...THEY WERE-- THEY WERE NEVER SO OVERT IN THEIR HATRED OF ME. I WAS NOT AN ADEPT. I HAD NO GIFTS. MY SISTER WAS THE GIFTED ONE. THE COVEN WAS RIGHT TO SHUN ME.
IT DOESN'T MATTER HOW IT HAPPENED. THIS IS HOW WE REMEMBER IT.

...AND MEMORY IS **ALL WE ARE.**

HA! DID YOU REALLY THINK THAT WOULD WORK, SISTER?
IT'S NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS WHAT I THINK, OR WHAT I DO.
OH, DON'T BE ANGRY. LOOK, I KNOW IT MUST BE HARD FOR YOU. SEEING ME RISE IN THE COVEN WHILE YOU--WHILE YOU DO **NOTHING.**
BUT THIS IS JUST THE WAY OF THE UNIVERSE. SOME PEOPLE ARE BORN TO BE GREAT. OTHERS...
--IT IS NOT WORTH THE RISK!
OF COURSE IT IS! IF IT'S TRUE IT IS WORTH *EVERYTHING!*

THAT IS EASY FOR YOU TO SAY, MOTHERS! YOU DON'T HAVE FLESH TO LOSE-- WE DO!
FLESH IS TEMPORARY. THE COVEN ENDURES.
IF THE SCROLLS ARE TO BE BELIEVED, THEN WE ARE CLOSER TO IT THAN WE EVER THOUGHT. IT IS WITHIN OUR GRASP!
IF THE SCROLLS ARE TRUE--**IF!**
YOU ARE TOO YOUNG TO REMEMBER WHAT THE UNIVERSE WAS LIKE, DAUGHTER--MAGIC WAS EVERYWHERE. IT WAS **EVERYTHING.** IT WASN'T JUST SOME SECRET THAT HAD TO HIDE IN AN OLD SHACK CONJURING MINOR SPELLS!
--IT WASN'T ALL LOST. **THE GREAT BEASTS** AND THE **GREAT RELICS** ENDURED. HIDDEN AWAY AND PROTECTED. NOW WE KNOW **WHERE THEY ARE** AND WE KNOW WHY OUR MOTHERS SETTLED **HERE** ON THIS BALL OF ICE OF ALL PLACES!
WE NEED TO ACT NOW. WE NEED TO FIND **THE SEEDBANK** BEFORE WE ARE ALL INCORPOREAL!
IF YOU ARE RIGHT--IF THE GREAT MAGIC WAS BURIED HERE ON THIS PLANET--THEN WE ALSO KNOW WHY THE UGC REMAINS HERE!
ARE YOU SAYING THE UGC KNOWS?!
THEY MUST KNOW! WHY ELSE WOULD THEY HAVE SUCH A HEAVY PRESENCE ON THIS FUCKING FRINGE WORLD THAT HAS NO STRATEGICAL VALUE TO THEM!?

THEY FEAR US. THEY FEAR WHAT WE WOULD DO TO THEIR PRECIOUS ORDER. THEIR MACHINES AND WEAPONS--WE HAVE NO WAY PAST THAT.
SO, WE WAIT.
WAIT? WAIT FOR WHAT?
HAVE YOU--HAVE YOU **SEEN SOMETHING?**
IT IS AS MY SISTER SAID, FLESH DIES. **MACHINES DIE.** THE COVEN LIVES FOREVER.

SNEAKY LITTLE BITCHES!
WHELP! WHAT HAVE WE TOLD YOU TWO ABOUT SNOOPING!
SORRY! I--I'M SORRY, MOTHER! I HEARD NOTHING!
YOU KNOW WHAT WE DO TO SNOOPS? YOU SEE THINGS YOU ARE NOT SUPPOSED TO, MAYBE WE SHOULD TAKE YOUR EYES!?
WHAT-- WHAT ABOUT HER? SHE SAW TOO!
SHE IS NONE OF YOUR CONCERN. YOUR SISTER IS ***COVEN-BOUND.*** YOU--YOU ARE ***NOTHING.***
GET INSIDE AND START CLEANING UP, WEAK THING!
Y-YES, MOTHERS.

WHAT'S THE POINT OF ALL OF THIS?
YOU WILL SEE.
YOU SHOULD HAVE STAYED IN THE DARK, LITTLE GIRL.
DARK? I WILL SHOW US **DARK**...
WHAT NOW?!
NOT WHAT. ***WHEN***...

WHY ARE YOU SHOWING ME THIS? THE MACHINES ARE GONE. THIS IS IRRELEVANT!
IS IT? I TOLD US... **BACK** IS THE WAY FORWARD...

THE PAST IS THE FUTURE.
HURRY, SISTER! SO SLOW.
C--COMING.
LOOK! SEE, WEAK THING! JUST LIKE MOTHERS TOLD US, THE MACHINES HAVE ALL GONE! IT IS UNPROTECTED!
ARE--ARE YOU SURE? IT MAY BE A TRAP.
NO. IT IS JUST AS OUR MOTHERS SAW IN THEIR DREAMS. THE GREAT MACHINES FINALLY RETURNED. THEY DESTROYED AND THEY RAGED AND IN THE END THEY TOOK ALL THE LITTLE MACHINES WITH THEM.
MY TIME IS FINALLY HERE.

THIS WAY, WEAK THING! BRING THEM INSIDE!
LET THEM OUT! LET THEM SEE!
AH!
IT IS CLOSE! THIS IS THE PLACE!
THERE! THAT IS IT! DO YOU FEEL IT?!
I FEEL IT! I FEEL IT!
YES, MOTHERS. THEY HAVE HIDDEN OUR LEGACY FROM US. THEY HAVE DENIED US OUR POWER. **NO MORE.**

SEE! IT IS TRUE!
THE SCROLLS WERE RIGHT!
THE SEEDS!
OUR HERITAGE!

WHO-- WHO PUT ALL THIS HERE?
SHUT UP, WEAK THING. THIS IS NOT FOR YOUR EYES.
IT IS TIME!
RELEASE IT!
PLANT THE SEEDS!
ARE YOU READY, MOTHERS? READY TO SHAPE THIS UNIVERSE BACK IN OUR IMAGE?
IGNITE THE FLAMES!
YES. IT IS TIME. *MY TIME.*
--?!

WHAT?!
WEAK THING! WHAT HAVE YOU DONE!?
NO. **NOT** WEAK THING. NOT ANYMORE...

...NEVER WEAK AGAIN.

IS THAT IT? IS THAT ALL YOU HAD TO SHOW ME?
YOU WERE SO EAGER TO FINALLY SNATCH POWER...
...THAT YOU NEVER STOPPED TO ASK THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION OF ALL...
I DON'T--
WHAT IS IT? WHAT HAVE I FORGOTTEN?
THE SEEDS. THE RELICS AND THE ARTIFACTS THAT GAVE YOU YOUR POWER. THESE WERE JUST **ENCHANTED ITEMS**...THINGS.
WHERE DID THEY GET THEIR POWER?
THE REAL PRIZE...
THE SOURCE OF ALL MAGIC!

SO... THE WEAK THING'S EYES ARE FINALLY OPENING.
MOTHERS?
MOTHERS!
NO...NOT MOTHERS. NOT ANYMORE.
JUST SISTER DEAREST.

I DON'T-- HOW DID YOU--
I HAD THEM KILLED. I TOOK THEIR ESSENCE. I TOOK BACK LIFE.
THE UGC ATTACK...
EASY TO ARRANGE. OUR DEFENSES LOWERED. OUR LOCATION REVEALED. EVEN IN MY INCORPOREAL STATE, I HAD **SOME** POWER.
TRAITOR!
LOOK WHO'S TALKING, **BITCH.**

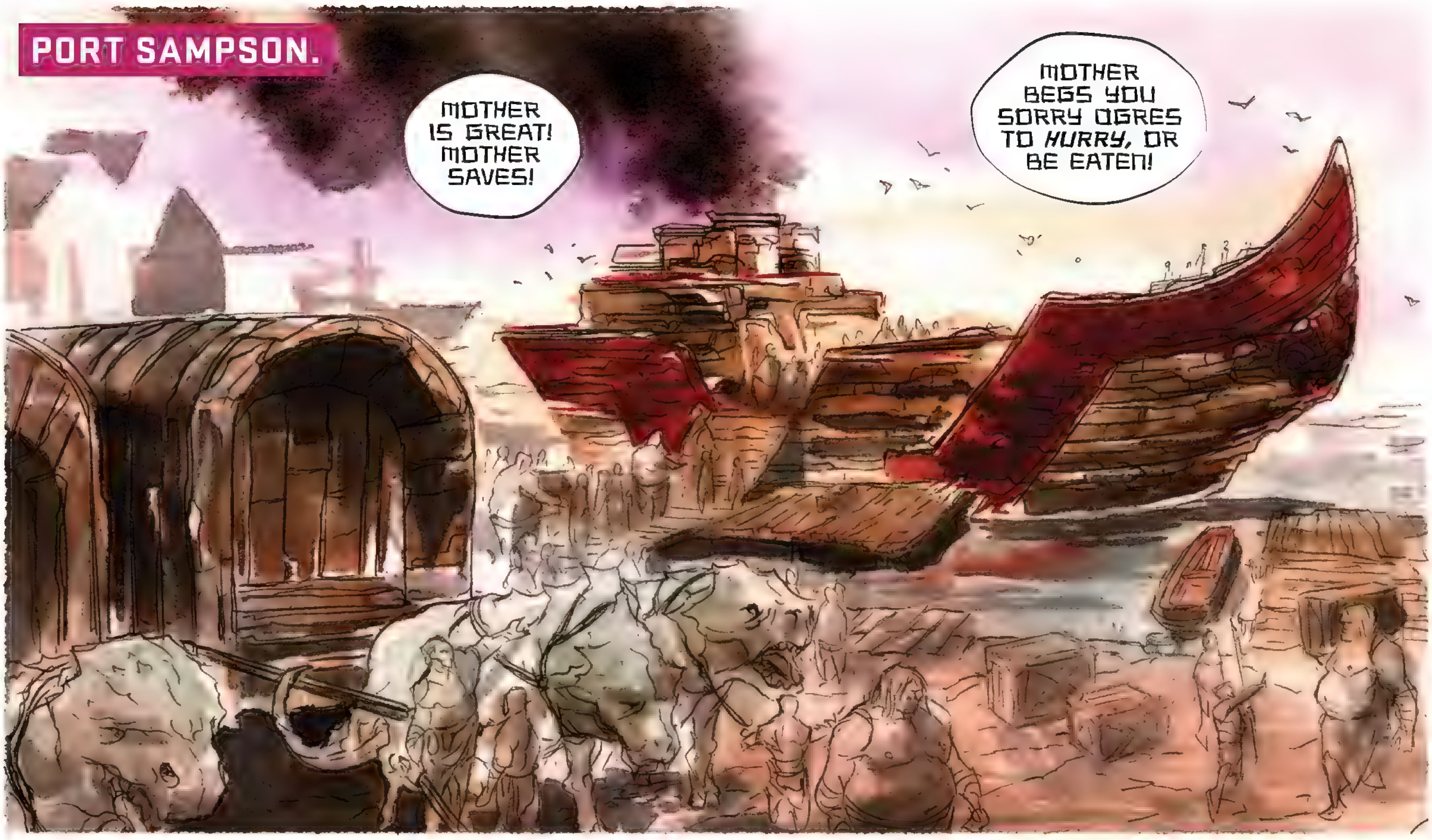
YOU SEE? NOW I AM FIVE. YOU ARE JUST ONE.
AND YOU...YOU ARE AS YOU WERE BORN TO BE.
A **WEAK** THING.
THE SEEDS WERE JUST THE BEGINNING. REAL POWER LIES AT THEIR SOURCE. THE SOURCE OF ALL MAGIC. AND WE ARE GOING TO FIND IT, SISTER. TOGETHER.
Y--YES...
YES, **WHAT?**
SAY IT.

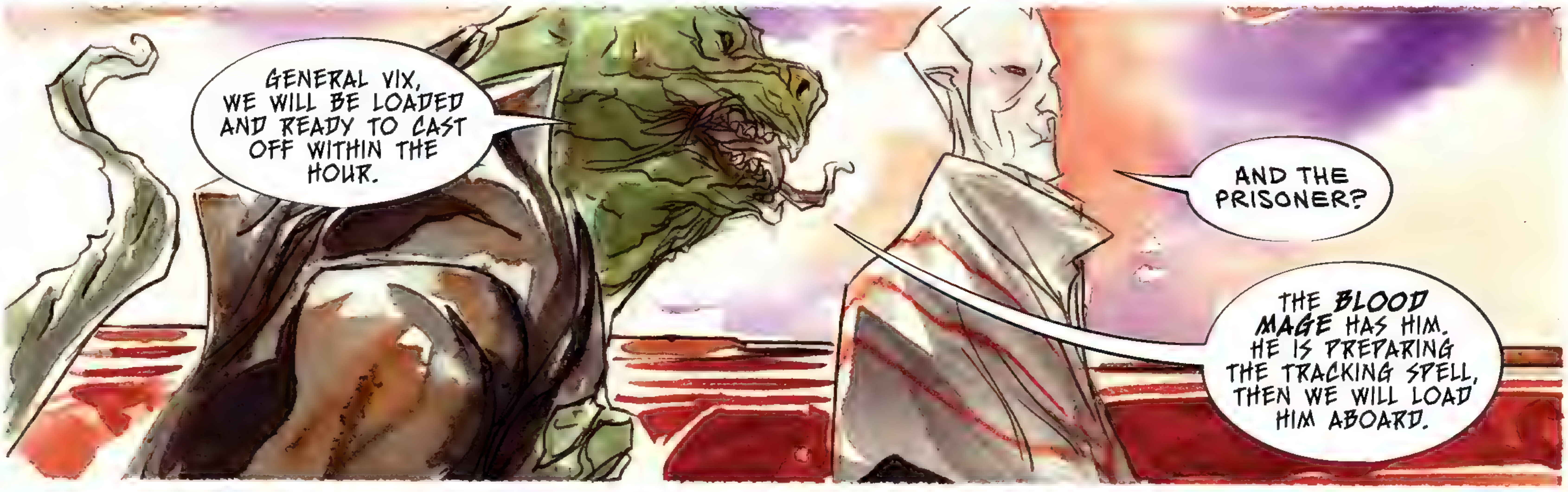
YES... MOTHER.

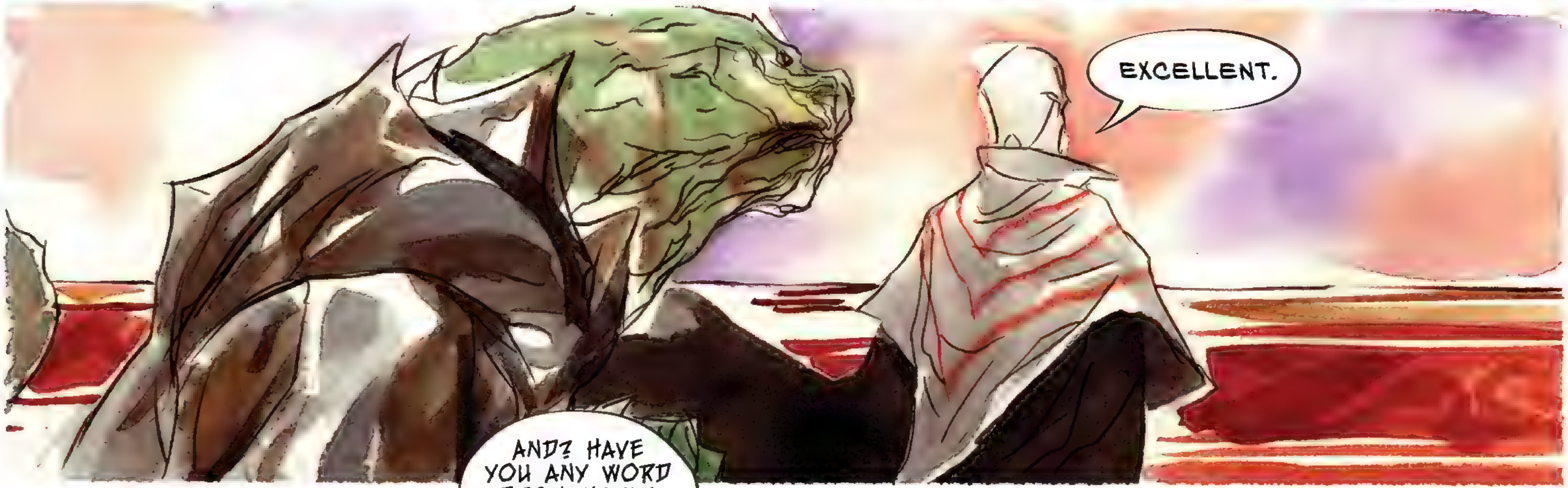
10

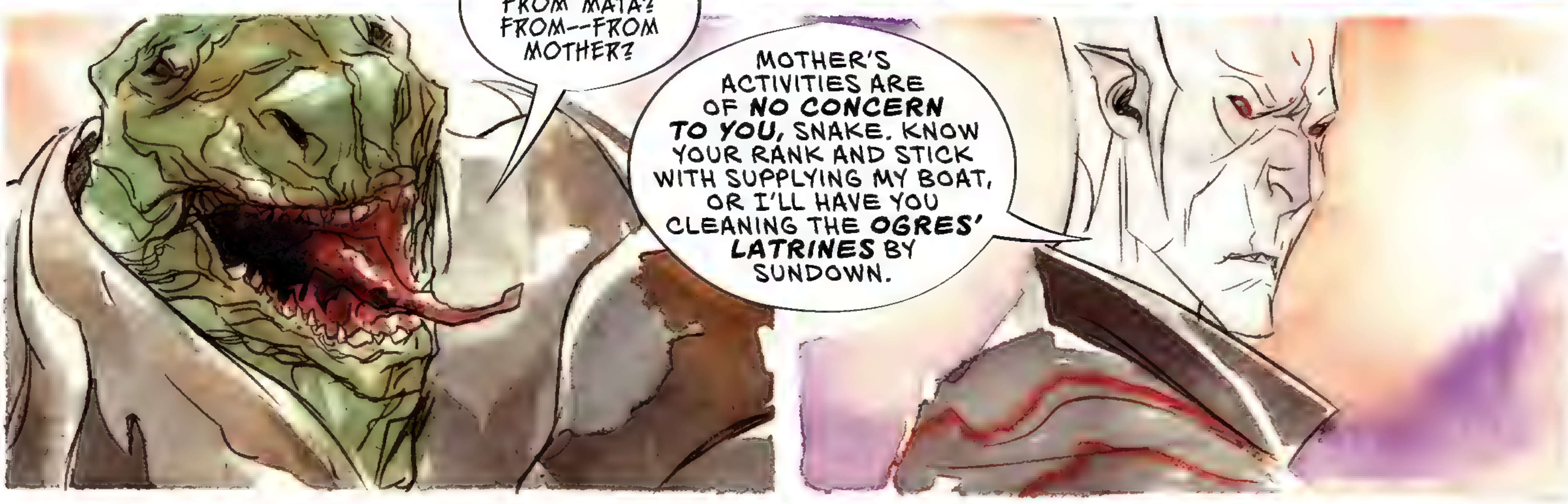
Change.
Everything is change.
Even magic is just changing one thing to another. But I wouldn't really learn that for a while.
Back then all I knew was that my life had changed. Everything I knew was gone. My dad. My home.
And every day I saw new things. Things I never could have dreamed of.
FRA!
But as exciting as it all was, I couldn't help but feel sad too, because I knew there would be no going back. Not ever.

Change would be all I ever knew now. And change can be scary.
--THERE SHE IS, CAPTAIN. HOW LONG HAS IT BEEN SINCE WE WERE LAST HERE?
WHAT, EIGHT YEARS? NINE?
SHOULD WE WAKE THE GIRLIE?
I'VE BEEN AWAKE FOR AN HOUR.
WHAT'D YOU DO TO YOUR HAIR?!
IT WAS GETTING IN MY EYES.
SO THAT'S IT? THE ISLAND WHERE YOUR SHIP IS HIDDEN?
UH... YEAH.
WELL, WHAT ARE WE WAITING FOR? LET'S GO.


PORT SAMPSON.
MOTHER IS GREAT! MOTHER SAVES!
MOTHER BEGS YOU SORRY OGRES TO *HURRY*, OR BE EATEN!


GENERAL VIX, WE WILL BE LOADED AND READY TO CAST OFF WITHIN THE HOUR.
AND THE PRISONER?
THE ***BLOOD MAGE*** HAS HIM. HE IS PREPARING THE TRACKING SPELL, THEN WE WILL LOAD HIM ABOARD.


EXCELLENT.


AND? HAVE YOU ANY WORD FROM MATA? FROM--FROM MOTHER?
MOTHER'S ACTIVITIES ARE OF ***NO CONCERN TO YOU,*** SNAKE. KNOW YOUR RANK AND STICK WITH SUPPLYING MY BOAT, OR I'LL HAVE YOU CLEANING THE ***OGRES' LATRINES*** BY SUNDOWN.

EFF!
EFF, YOU HAVE TO GET ME OUT OF HERE!
WOULD YOU **PLEASE** QUIET HIM DOWN. THIS SPELL IS A REAL BITCH TO GET RIGHT.
MILA, EFF-- THEY ARE GOING AFTER MILA! OUR LITTLE GIRL-- **OUR BABY!**
I **KNOW** YOU REMEMBER! I KNOW YOU DO!
REMEMBER THAT FIRST TIME YOU HELD HER! REMEMBER THOSE NIGHTS TOGETHER IN THE COLONY. JUST THE THREE OF US!

SSSHUT UP!
I WON'T SHUT UP!
YOU WANT TO GET MAD? THAT'S GOOD! GET MAD! THAT'S THE EFFIE I REMEMBER! THAT'S THE **QUEEN BETWEEN** I REMEMBER!
GET AWAY FROM THERE! IF YOU CAN'T CONTROL YOURSELF, I'LL HAVE YOU REMOVED FROM THE ROOM!
DID YOU HEAR ME, VAMP!? AWAY!
HSSSSS!
HKKT!

HUNGRY-- WAS **SO *HUNGRY***... COULDN'T THINK.
BUT NOW...
E--EFF?
ANDY.

IT'S CHANGED.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
IT WASN'T LIKE THIS LAST TIME WE WERE HERE. IT WAS-- GREEN THEN. ALIVE.
IT'S NOT THE ISLAND I'M WORRIED ABOUT, IT'S THE GIRL.
SHE SEEMS OKAY TO ME.
THAT'S EXACTLY WHY I'M WORRIED. LITTLE GIRLIE JUST SAW HER PAPA DIE AND SHE'S BARELY SKIPPED A BEAT.
IT'S LIKE SHE'S IGNORING IT. AND EVENTUALLY ALL THAT HURT'S GONNA FIND A WAY TO COME OUT.
THAT HAIRCUT...
IT'S JUST A HAIRCUT, HELDA.
IF YOU SAY SO, CAPTAIN.

SHOULD BE JUST UP THERE.
CAPTAIN, I DON'T LIKE THIS...
YEAH. ME EITHER. LET'S JUST GET OUT OF HERE.
FRA! FRA!
CAREFUL, MILA.
LET'S JUST HOPE WE STILL HAVE POWER.
THANK SCRAP.
HELDA?
WE ***AREN'T ALONE*** IN HERE.

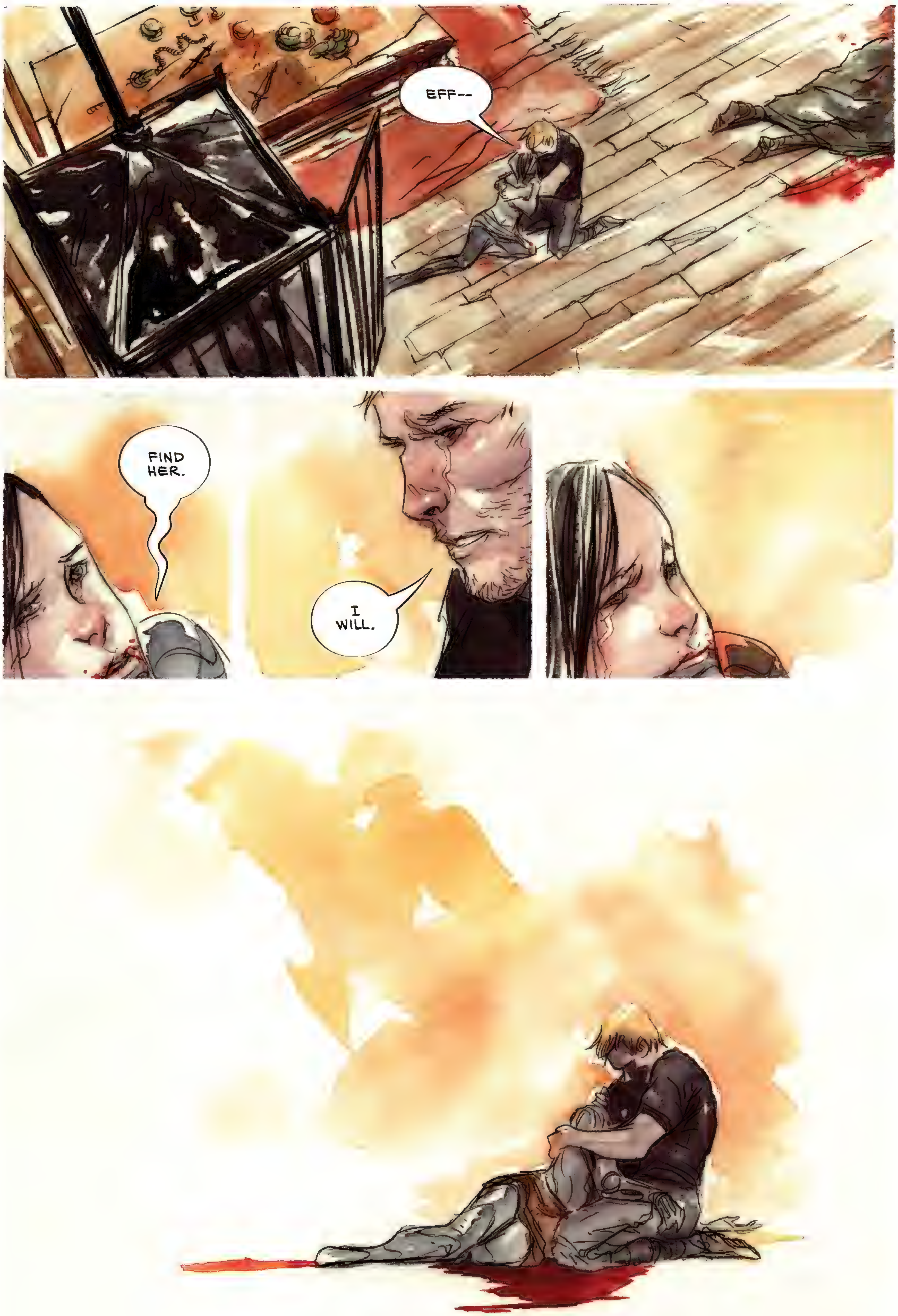
MILA! GET BACK HERE!
MILA!
I'M HERE. IT'S OKAY...
?
IT'S EMPTY.
BANDIT! STOP IT!
>:[

ALOOOOOOONE!
AAAHHHHHHHHH!
FRA!
FRA!
FRA!
FRA!

THEY--THEY KEEP US SO HUNGRY. BLINDS EVERYTHING.
EVERYTHING GOES BLACK. ALL I WANT IS BLOOD--
IT'S HOW THEY CONTROL US. HOW **SHE** CONTROLS US.
IT'S OKAY, EFF. IT'S ALL GOING TO BE OKAY.
NO IT'S NOT. THE HUNGER WILL RETURN. I'LL FORGET AGAIN. I'LL FORGET EVERYTHING. I'LL FORGET **YOU** AND--MILA.
THEN--THEN WE DEAL WITH IT **TOGETHER**. BUT RIGHT NOW WE NEED TO GET OUT OF HERE.

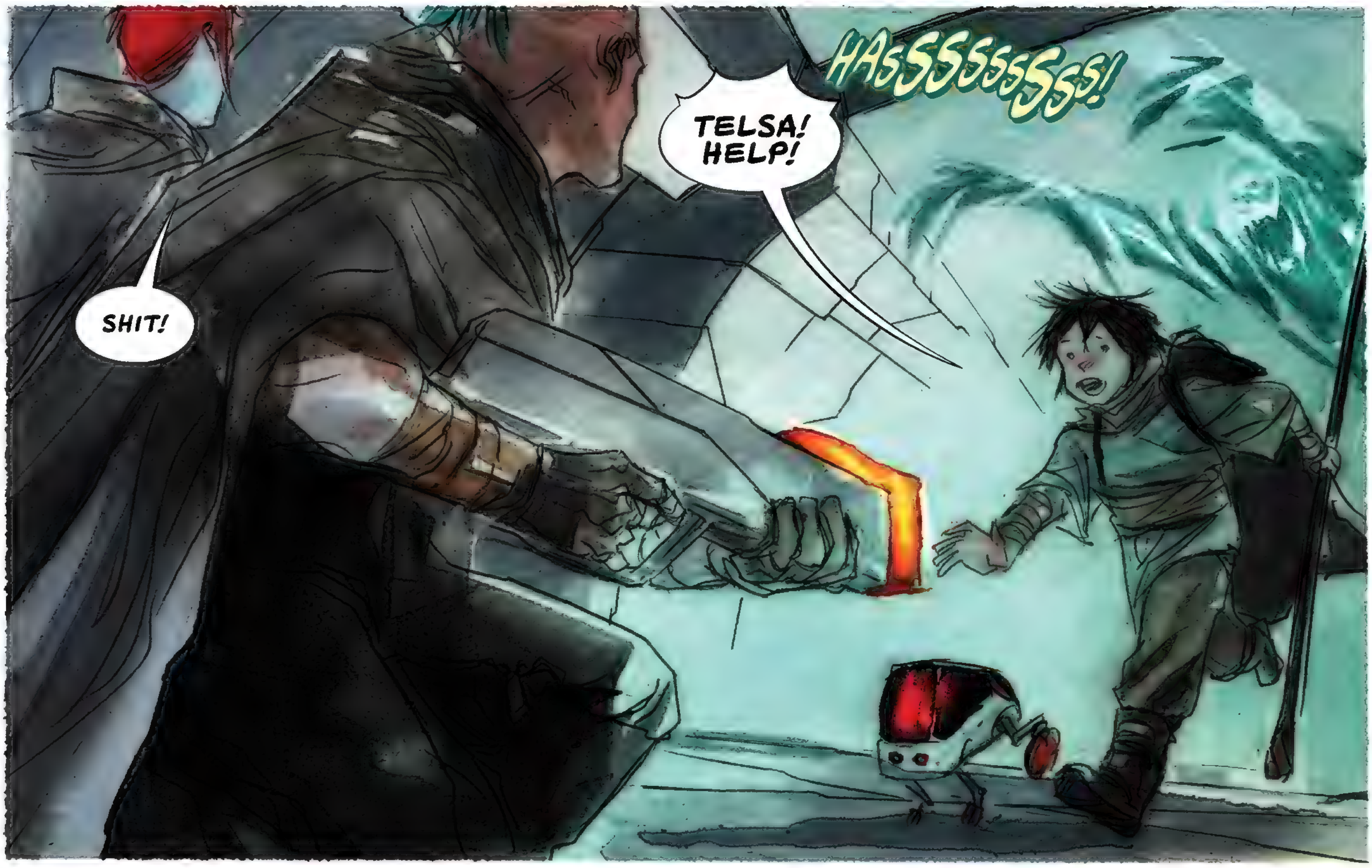
NO.
I CAN'T. I WON'T BE ABLE TO STOP IT.
YOU HAVE TO.
YOU HAVE TO *STOP* IT.
EFF, I DON'T--
I DON'T WANT TO BE LIKE THIS ANYMORE...
I WANT IT TO END LIKE THIS. WHILE I STILL *REMEMBER YOU.*
WHILE I STILL REMEMBER *MILA.*

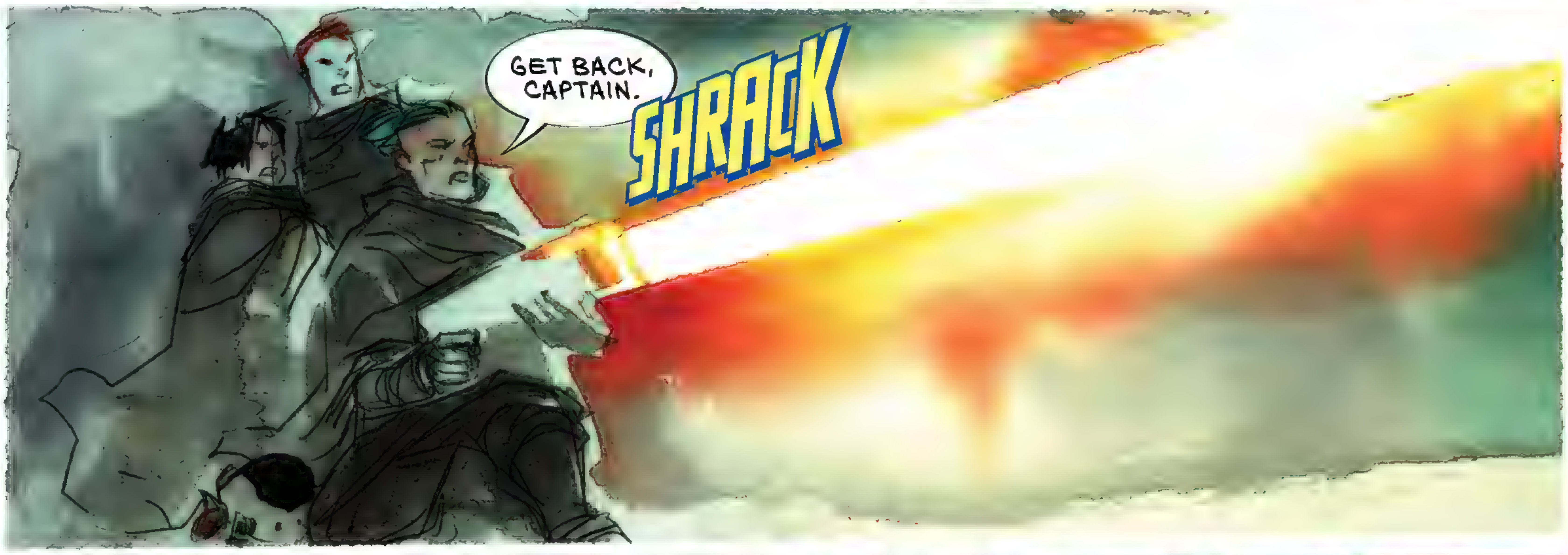
NO! NO WAY!
WE'LL FIND A WAY. WE'LL FIX YOU!
THIS **IS** THE WAY.
THE ONLY WAY TO FIX ME.
I CAN'T DO IT MYSELF. IT WON'T WORK UNLESS ANOTHER--
NO. I WON'T.
DO YOU LOVE ME? DO YOU STILL LOVE ME?
YES. YOU **KNOW** I DO.
THEN **FREE ME.**
MAKE IT GO AWAY. PLEASE, ANDY... **PLEASE.**

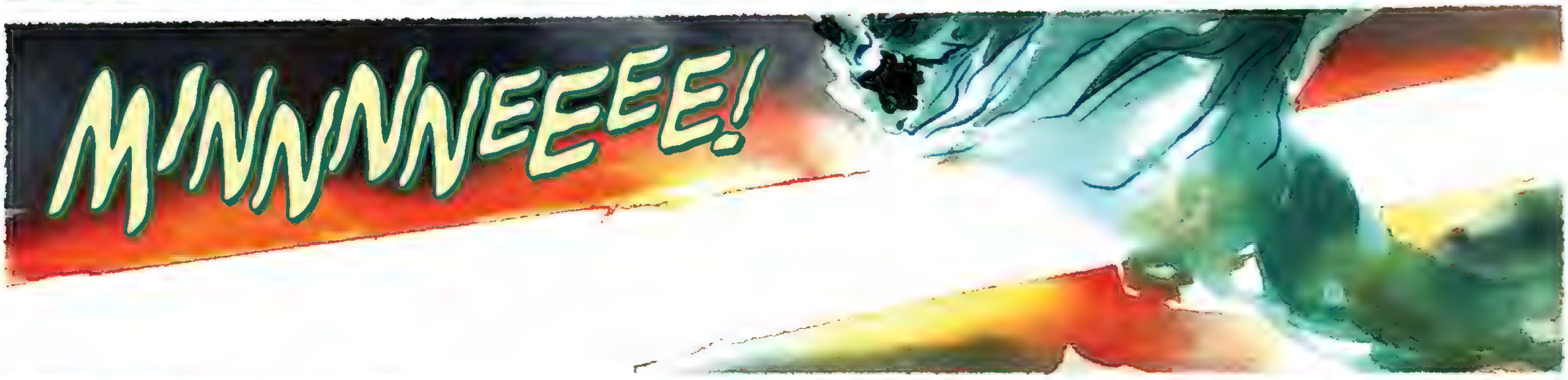

EFF--
FIND HER.
I WILL.

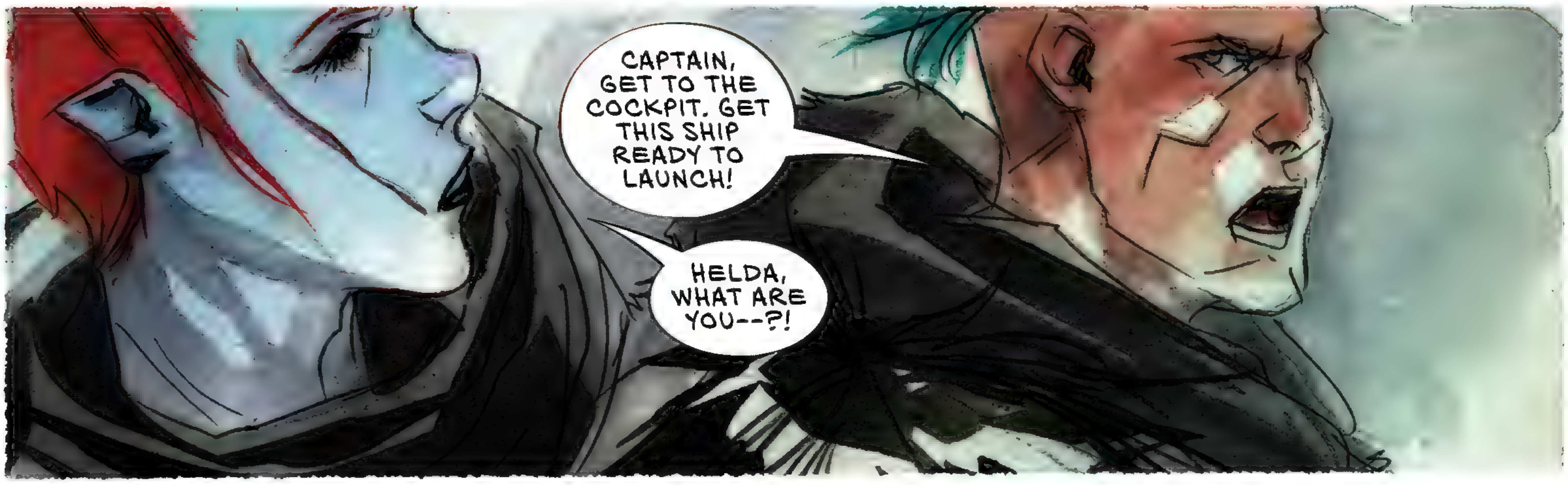
WHAT THE--
GAH!
FUCKING DIE! ALL OF YOU!
ARRGH!
ALL OF YOU!

NO! STOP HIM! WE CAN'T TRACK THE GIRL WITHOUT HIM!
MOTHER FORBIDS THIS!
MOTHER CAN GO FUCK HERSELF.


HASSSSSSSSS!
TELSA! HELP!
SHIT!


GET BACK, CAPTAIN.
SHRACK


MINNNNEEEE!


CAPTAIN, GET TO THE COCKPIT. GET THIS SHIP READY TO LAUNCH!
HELDA, WHAT ARE YOU--?!

COME ON THEN, YOU FILTHY SCRUBBER! COME AND GET ME!
HELDA! DON'T!
GO, TELSA! GO! TAKE OFF!
COME ON!
COME AND GET ME!

HSSSSSS!
THAT'S IT...
COME AND GET ME!
HSSSSSSS!

HELDA!
GO!
NO! I'M NOT LEAVING YOU!
IT--IT'S OKAY, TELSA... LET ME GO.

THRA-KOOOM
BE GONE!

I SAID **BE GONE,** HUNGRY GHOST!
HSSSSSSS!
HELLO, FRIENDS. YOU HAVE ARRIVED AT LAST.
YOU-- I ***KNOW YOU.***
NOT REALLY. WE ONLY MET ONCE, IN PASSING.
BUT YOU DO KNOW MY COMPANION--

Hrrrm... DRILLER HATES GHOSTS.
DRILLER'S A KILLER... DRILLER'S A REAL GHOST KILLER.

II

"I WAS THERE AT **THE END.** WHEN THE **BIG MACHINES** CAME.
"I WAS THERE WHEN THEY WAVED THEIR HANDS AND ALL THE LITTLE MACHINES **WENT AWAY.**
"COURSE I DIDN'T KNOW ANY OF THAT THEN. I WAS JUST SCARED **SHITLESS** LIKE EVERYONE ELSE.
"DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO DO. SO I USED WHATEVER MAGIC I HAD IN THESE OLD BONES...AND I GOT AS FAR AWAY FROM THERE AS I COULD.
"AND I TOOK MY **ONLY FRIEND** WITH ME.
"DIDN'T REALIZE IT THEN, BUT ME USING MAGIC TO TELEPORT **THE BIG FELLA** AWAY WHEN I DID, IT MUST HAVE SOMEHOW STOPPED HIM FROM GOING WHEREVER THE DESCENDERS SENT ALL THE OTHER BOTS."

"DON'T THINK I REALLY THOUGHT ABOUT WHERE WE WERE GOING, MY OLD BRAIN MUST'VE JUST SENT US BACK TO WHERE I'D SPENT THE LAST THIRTY YEARS OF MY LIFE. THE ***PLANET WOCH.***
"IT'S WHERE I'D FIRST MET THE BIG FELLA, AND IT'S WHERE WE ENDED UP AS THE REST OF THE UNIVERSE WENT ASS OVER TEA KETTLE.
"TOOK ALMOST EVERYTHING I HAD TO GET US THERE. DON'T KNOW HOW LONG I SLEPT AFTER THAT.
"...BUT DRILLER NEVER LEFT MY SIDE.
"I KNEW THINGS HAD CHANGED. I COULD FEEL IT. SOMETHING ***OLD*** HAD AWAKENED. THE MAGIC I ALWAYS PRACTICED IN SECRET...IT WAS IN THE AIR NOW. NO LONGER IN HIDING."

"AND NEITHER WERE THE SCRAPPIN' VAMPIRES."
"THOSE BLOOD-SUCKING BASTARDS HAD SPENT EONS UNDERGROUND, AND WHEN THEY FINALLY CAME UP... THEY WERE **HUNGRY.**"
"HAVING THE BIG FELLA BY MY SIDE WAS ALL THAT KEPT ME ALIVE."

"COULDN'T STAY ON WOCH. TOO SMALL AND NOT ENOUGH PLACES TO HIDE. AND HIDE WAS WHAT WE'D DO FOR THE NEXT TEN YEARS. HIDE FROM VAMPS. HIDE FROM MOTHER'S BLACK MAGIC...AND HIDE FROM THE ***TECH HUNTERS.***
"I USED A CLOAKING SPELL TO SNEAK US ON ONE OF THE LAST RELOCATION VESSELS BEFORE THE MILITIA TOTALLY SHUT DOWN WHAT WAS LEFT OF THE UGC.
"DON'T KNOW WHY I CHOSE SAMPSON. JUST HAD A FEELING. SOMETHING IN MY GUT TELLING ME WE NEEDED TO BE THERE.
"AND THAT'S WHERE WE STAYED.
"THE ONE NIGHT, NOT THREE MONTHS AGO I HAD A VISION. MAGIC COMES WHEN YOU LEAST EXPECT IT...
"AND THIS TIME IT SHOWED ME WHERE WE NEEDED TO GO.
"LUCKILY MOTHER'S MILITIA DON'T PATROL THE OPEN WATERS MUCH. IF ANYTHING, BEING OUT THERE I FELT SAFER AND MORE ALIVE THAN I HAD IN YEARS. I KNEW THIS WAS RIGHT...I KNEW THIS WAS WHAT WE HAD TO DO."

...AND NOW I KNOW WHY.
WE'VE BEEN WAITING FOR **YOU.**
ME?
YEAH, LITTLE 'UN. **YOU.**
YOU GOT MAGIC IN YA, KIDDO. BIG **BIG** MAGIC.
I'M **NO WITCH!** I'M A STAR FIGHTER JUST LIKE TELSA AND MY DAD! I **EVEN KILLED A VAMPIRE ONCE!**
FRA! FRA!
IF YOU SAY SO.
FRA!
YAPPY BOT?

Hrrrm...DRILLER NEVER THOUGHT HE'D SEE ANOTHER ROBOT AGAIN... ESPECIALLY NOT LITTLE YAPPY BOT.
FRA!
FRA! FRA!
BUT DRILLER'S HAPPY. *Hrrrm...* DRILLER ALMOST *MISSED* YAPPY BOT.
I HATE TO BREAK IT TO YOU, MIZERD, BUT WE ARE NOT **MEANT** TO DO ANYTHING HERE EXCEPT **LEAVE.**
WONDERFUL. WHERE ARE WE GOING?

WE, AS IN MILA, HELDA AND I, ARE GOING TO GET THIS RUST PILE WORKING AGAIN AND THEN WE'RE GETTING OFF-WORLD.
BANDIT HAS A MAP. HE'S A BIT SCRAPPED UP, BUT I KNOW SOMEONE WHO CAN FIX HIM.
WELL, I THINK YOU'RE GONNA HAVE A HARD TIME GETTING THE LITTLE BOT TO LEAVE WITHOUT DRILLER.
AND I DON'T SUPPOSE YOU OR THE BIG BOT CAN HELP FIX THIS TUB OF TRASH, CAN YOU, WIZARD?
SORRY, NEVER BEEN TOO GOOD WITH A WRENCH.
WHAT ABOUT THAT GHOST THAT WAS IN THE SHIP? ANY MORE OF THOSE AROUND HERE?
GHOSTS?
THESE DAYS, THERE'S GHOSTS EVERYWHERE, TELSA.

SAW! SAW!
SAW! SAW! SAW! SAW! SAW!
A FLOCK OF BLINKLESS!
MILITIA WON'T BE LONG NOW! WE NEED TO GET THIS IN THE AIR, HELDA!
ON IT, CAPTAIN!

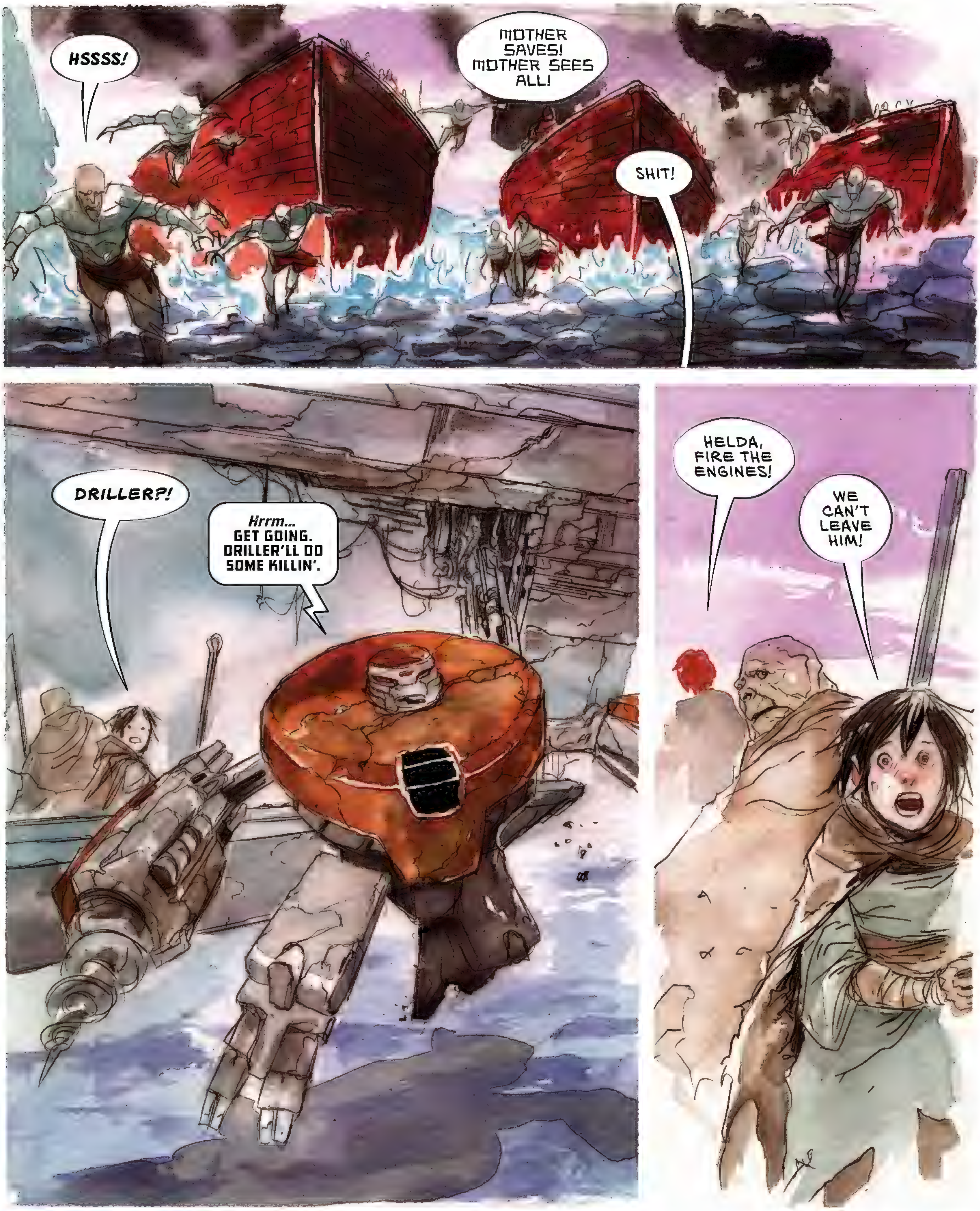
Hrrrm... DRILLER HATES EYEBALL BIRDS.
FRA! FRA!
I HATE THEM TOO! NOW THE TROLLS AND VAMPS WILL COME!
DRILLER AIN'T SCARED OF NO VAMPS. DRILLER'S A REAL VAMP KILLER.
I LIKE YOU, DRILLER.
Hrmm...

MATA.
WHAT DO YOU WANT, SISTER? WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO ACCOMPLISH WITH THIS TREACHERY?
TREACHERY? TSK. IF ANYONE KNOWS TREACHERY, YOU MURDEROUS BITCH...
I WILL RULE. IT IS THAT SIMPLE. YOUR REIGN IS OVER. I AM MOTHER OF THE GALAXY NOW. AND WHEN WE FIND THE SOURCE OF MAGIC, MY REIGN WILL BE ETERNAL.
POWER COMES IN MANY FORMS, SISTER. YOU MAY HAVE MORE MAGIC THAN ME, BUT MY ARMIES ARE LOYAL. THEY WILL NEVER FOLLOW YOU.
WHICH IS EXACTLY WHY I AM GOING TO KEEP YOU AROUND, WEAK THING.

NO! I WON'T LET YOU TREAT ME LIKE THIS! I SWORE, NEVER AGAIN!
NEVER AGAIN!
YOU **WILL** DO EXACTLY WHAT I SAY.
--UNGH!
I FOUGHT! I FOUGHT AND BLED FOR ALL THAT I HAVE! IT ALWAYS JUST CAME TO YOU. I HAD TO EARN IT AND YOU ***WILL NOT TAKE IT, SISTER!***

I'VE ALREADY TAKEN IT, YOU FOOL. THE MAGIC OF **ALL OF OUR MOTHERS** IS MINE. YOU ARE NOW A MINOR CONJURER AT BEST...
AND AT WORST...
A WEAK LITTLE THING AGAIN.
NO!
NOW COME, WEAK THING. WE HAVE MUCH WORK TO DO.
WHERE... WHERE ARE WE GOING?
WHERE ELSE? WE ARE GOING **HOME.**

THEY'RE COMING!
TELSA! THEY'RE COMING!
FRA!
I HEARD YOU THE FIRST TIME!
HOW WE LOOKING, HELDA?
ZZKT
SHE MAY GET OFF THE GROUND, BUT AFTER THAT...
GOOD ENOUGH! GET IN EVERYONE, LET'S GO, HURRY!
Hrrm... DRILLER DON'T HURRY. DRILLER IS DRILLER.
DRILLER IS GOING OVERBOARD IF HE DOESN'T SHUT UP AND MOVE!
Hrmm...
DON'T YOU "HRRRM" ME! I'LL HAVE YOU FOR SPARE PARTS, YOU BIG SCRAP PILE!


HSSSS!
MOTHER SAVES! MOTHER SEES ALL!
SHIT!
DRILLER?!
Hrrm... GET GOING. DRILLER'LL DO SOME KILLIN'.
HELDA, FIRE THE ENGINES!
WE CAN'T LEAVE HIM!
I PROMISED YOUR DAD I'D GET YOU OFF THIS ROCK! I CAN'T RISK THAT JUST BECAUSE YOU FOUND A NEW PET! NOW STRAP IN!
DON'T WORRY ABOUT DRILLER, YOUNG'UN...

"IT'S THOSE VAMPS YOU SHOULD PRAY FOR."
Hrmm... COME ON THEN, YOU BLOOD DRINKING BAGS OF MEAT!
RROOAAAR!
Hrrm...
ROOOAAARRR!

ENGINE ONE IS ONLY AT HALF POWER, BUT TWO IS PRIMED.
OKAY, LETS **PUNCH** IT!
I TOLD YOU WE **CAN'T** LEAVE HIM!
AND I TOLD YOU TO STRAP IN AND SHUT UP, YOU LITTLE BRAT!
FWOOOOM
Hrrrm... DRILLER HATES CAVE TROLLS.
--RAAAAARRGHH!

MOTHER FORBIDS THIS! MOTHER FORBIDS IT!
HSSSS!
Hrmm...
DRILLER DRILL YOUR FANGY FACE, VAMP! GET OFF A' DRILLER!

BANDIT!
FRA! FRA!
MILA!
Hrrm...
CAREFUL LITTLE HUMAN! DRILLER'S GOT A STUBBORN VAMP DRILLER CAN'T SHAKE. GET BACK!
FRA!

EVERYONE NEEDS TO STOP *TELLING ME WHAT TO DO!*
Hrrm...
--GRRK!
LITTLE GIRL'S A KILLER. LITTLE GIRL'S A *REAL* KILLER.
TOLD YOU.

EVERYTHING ALL RIGHT BACK THERE?
SHIP IS CLEAR. AND I SAVED DRILLER. GUESS I'LL JUST **SHUT UP** AND **STRAP IN** NOW, CAPTAIN.
DON'T LOOK AT ME LIKE THAT.
WHATEVER YOU SAY, CAPTAIN.
LOOK THERE, MILA. WE'RE CLEARING THE ATMOSPHERE.
I'VE NEVER BEEN IN SPACE BEFORE. NEVER EVEN BEEN OFF-WORLD BEFORE.
I TOLD YOU, LITTLE ONE...
"FIRST THE SEA, THEN THE STARS."

The Royal Vessel of Gnish. Somewhere in Space.
YOUR HIGHNESS, WE'VE DETECTED AN ILLEGAL DEEP SPACE CRAFT TAKING OFF FROM SAMPSON. LOOKS LIKE A PRE-WAR CLASS CRUISER.
SO?! WHAT DO I CARE? LET THE OLD WITCH HANDLE IT. I'VE ALMOST CLEARED THE NEXT LEVEL, AND LATER ON J'LOT AND I ARE GOING TO RECORD MY DEBUT ALBUM IN THE SHIP'S NEW RECORDING STUDIO.
=AHEM= YES, AND I DO LOOK FORWARD TO LISTENING TO THAT, YOUR HIGHNESS, BUT IT IS GNISH'S SWORN DUTY TO INVESTIGATE ANY ILLEGAL TECH AND CONFISCATE.
AND NEED I REMIND YOU THAT MOTHER IS WATCHING US VERY CLOSELY.
=SIGH= FINE. SET A COURSE TO INTERCEPT THE ILLEGALS AND PREPARE ALL WEAPONS.
I HAVEN'T SLAUGHTERED ANYONE IN AGES.

12

I AM TWELVE YEARS OLD AND I SEE YOU FOR THE FIRST TIME.
I AM FIFTEEN AND I SEE YOU AGAIN AT THE ROBOT RALLIES FULL OF ANGER AND SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS. FULL OF **LIFE.**
I'M TWENTY-TWO AND THE DESCENDERS HAVE TAKEN TIM AWAY AND WE ARE LEFT WITH EACH OTHER, ONCE AGAIN. BUT DEEP DOWN WE KNOW THAT'S ALL WE NEED. EACH OTHER.

I'M TWENTY-FOUR AND I'M PROVEN WRONG, BECAUSE OUR DAUGHTER IS BORN, AND NOW I KNOW ALL WE EVER REALLY NEEDED WAS HER.
I'M TWENTY-SIX AND YOU AND I HOLD HANDS AS WE WALK ACROSS DIRISHU WITH MILA ON YOUR BACK AND I HEAR HER SAY "MOMMY" FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MY HELMET COMM.
YOU HEAR IT TOO AND YOU SQUEEZE MY HAND.

I'M TWENTY-SEVEN AND THE MONSTERS DRAG YOU AWAY FROM US, AND I THINK I'LL NEVER SEE YOU AGAIN.
I'M THIRTY-TWO AND I FINALLY FIND YOU AGAIN. AND THEN YOU DIE IN MY ARMS.

AND NOW **YOU'RE GONE.** MILA'S GONE. AND I HAVE **NOTHING.**

EFF?!
ANDY?!
MY MECH SYSTEM--MY **BETWEEN PARTS**--
--THEY WERE ALWAYS SET ON STAND-BY.
A FAILSAFE IN CASE MY HEART GAVE OUT.
ONCE IT DIED, AND MY CYBERNETIC PARTS TOOK OVER... THEY MUST HAVE **PURGED** THE VAMP VIRUS!
WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER?
NOTHING. NOTHING AND **EVERYTHING.**
I REMEMBER YOU. I REMEMBER MILA. DIRISHU. THEN THE VAMPS CAME. AND THEN IT WAS DARK, DARK **FOREVER.**
BUT NOW **HERE YOU ARE.**
HERE I AM.

EFF? WHAT IS IT?
SENSORS ARE PICKING UP MOVEMENT...**LOTS OF IT.** MOVING, BUT NOT WARM-BLOODED.
DO YOU HAVE ANY WEAPONS?
NOTHING.
THERE'S NO FIGHTING THEM, THEN. WE GOTTA **MOVE!**

MOTHER SAVES! MOTHER LOVES YOU!
CRSSSH
GENERAL VIX--OUR SCOUTS HAVE PICKED UP THEIR SCENT AHEAD!
EXCELLENT! KEEP PRESSING FORWARD AND SEND A SMALL PARTY TO FLANK THEM AND CUT THEM OFF.
YES, GENERAL.
ORACLE PRIME, LINK ME THROUGH WITH THE MOON OF AMUN.
YES, GENERAL. ESTABLISHING LINK--

G-G-G-GENERAL V-VIX! TWHAT DO W-W-W-WE OWE THIS HONOR?
HAVE YOU HEARD FROM MOTHER? IS SHE THERE?
MOTHER? WHY **NO**, GENERAL, NEITHER THROBIN NOR I HAVE HEARD FROM MOTHER IN A FEW CYCLES. IT'S NOT LIKE **YOU** TO LOSE TRACK OF HER. DON'T TELL ME YOU'VE FINALLY FALLEN FROM MOTHER'S GRACES AND HER **BED?**
FOOLS!
...
WHERE **ARE** YOU, MOTHER?

THIS WAY!
HOLD UP! THERE'S SOMETHING I NEED TO TELL YOU. MILA. SHE'S--
IS SHE HURT?!
NO... NO. BUT SHE'S WITH TELSA.
TELSA?!
I KNOW. LONG STORY.
WELL, WHERE ARE THEY? I **NEED** TO SEE HER, ANDY.

LAST TIME I SAW THEM THEY WERE GOING OUT TO SEA.
WHAT?! YOU DON'T EVEN KNOW **WHERE SHE IS?!**
HEY! CUT ME SOME SLACK HERE, EFF! I'VE BEEN DEALING WITH A **FEW THINGS!**
WHAT? WHAT IS IT?
FOUR OF THEM. AHEAD!
AND THE REST CLOSING IN FAST BEHIND.
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
WOODEN STAKES.

GATHER AS MANY AS YOU CAN!
HSSSSS!
TOO LATE!
TRAITOR!
UNGH!
HSSSSS!
GET UP, EFF!

HSSSS!
SSSS!
HSSSS!
TOO LATE. STAY CLOSE.
ALWAYS.
HSSSSSSSS!
CAN'T RUN ANYMORE. THIS IS IT. WE HAVE TO FIGHT.
AWAY, ABOMINATIONS!
SHLUNK

THESE WOODS BELONG TO KANTOS!
M'LADY!
THANKS!
--GAH!

BACK *TO HELL*, FIEND!
DO YOU REQUIRE SAFE PASSAGE, FRIENDS?
YEAH. THAT WOULD BE GOOD.
IT WOULD BE KANTOS' PLEASURE TO ASSIST YOU. ANY ENEMY OF *THE BEASTS* IS A FRIEND OF THESE WOODS.
THERE ARE MORE COMING. *A LOT* MORE.
THAT IS GOOD. KANTOS' BLADES ARE *THIRSTY*.

SKREEEEE
COME, WEAK THING. BACK TO WHERE WE BEGAN.
I DON'T LIKE THIS PLACE.
TSK. YOU'RE ACTING LIKE A CHILD.
THIS IS WHERE YOU ALWAYS BELONGED, LITTLE SISTER. SCRUBBING FLOORS. CLEANING.
IF YOU'D JUST STAYED ***IN YOUR PLACE,*** NONE OF THIS WOULD HURT SO MUCH.
WHY ARE WE HERE? HERE OF ALL PLACES?
THIS IS NOT WHY WE CAME HERE. I JUST WANTED TO REMIND YOU OF HOW SMALL YOU REALLY ARE.

THIS WAY. HURRY, WEAK THING.
ALL THE GREAT BEASTS WERE RELEASED LONG AGO. THE MOST POWERFUL RELICS STORED IN MY CASTLE, THEIR POWER ABSORBED OR USED UP.
YES, BUT THIS PLACE ITSELF...IT HAS POWER. POWER THAT CAN NEVER BE REMOVED.
THE UGC LIVED HERE. SURROUNDING THIS PLACE FOR DECADES. IT CONNECTS *US* TO *THEM.*
GIVE ME YOUR HAND.

OUCH!
QUIET, BABY.
THE UGC REBELS...A MAGE PROTECTS THEM. SOMEONE WHOSE POWER CHALLENGES OURS. BUT HOW DID THIS MYSTERY MAGE GET THAT POWER? IT WAS NOT FROM US. NOT FROM THE RELICS STORED HERE.
YES! THE ENEMY MUST HAVE FOUND THAT WHICH WE SEEK...THE SOURCE OF MAGIC.
THE SOURCE!
WE FIND THE MAGE WE ELIMINATE THE REBELS AND FIND THE SOURCE.
BUT BEFORE WE FIND HIM...WE NEED TO KNOW WHO HE IS...
THERE LOOK--HIS FACE EMERGES!
BUT--IT'S NOT A MAN AT ALL...

--IT'S JUST A *BOY!*
THAT'S NO BOY.

13

I can't believe I'm actually in space! I mean--really in space, aboard a spaceship and traveling to mysterious forbidden planets, just like Dad and Mom used to do!
Turns out getting off Sampson was the hard part (and also the scariest, but most exciting). The truth is, space travel itself is sort of boring.
We can't uses shiftdrives anymore or Mother's legions will detect us, so we have to travel with basic propulsion which takes forever.
Bandit and I have started playing hide and seek in the back of the ship with Driller.
Telsa keeps yelling at us to stop running around, but I can tell she doesn't really mean it.
GO, BANDIT, GO! HE FOUND US, WE GOTTA MAKE IT BACK TO BASE!
HRRM... DRILLER HATES STUPID HIDING GAMES. DRILLER'S TOO BIG TO HIDE ANYWHERE GOOD.
FOUND YOU!
Hrrm...
FRA!

The old wizard that we found with Driller is sort of weird, but mostly just really nice. He keeps trying to tell me I can do magic, but I don't believe him.
NOW, DON'T THINK ABOUT MY HANDS, OR WHAT'S THERE...
THINK ABOUT WHAT'S **NOT** THERE, BUT **COULD** BE!
FRA! FRA!
FRA! FRA!
IT'S **NOT REAL,** BANDIT! CALM DOWN!
YOU SEE, THAT'S YOUR PROBLEM! IT **IS** REAL IF YOU WANT IT TO BE. YOU NEED TO **BELIEVE.** MAGIC IS ALL ABOUT **FAITH,** MILA.
When I think of magic, all I think of is Mother and Vamps and the Militia. But Mizerd says it doesn't have to be that. He says magic can be anything to anyone and it all depends on who's doing it.

Who knows? Maybe he's right. Maybe it would be kind of cool to do magic.
FRA!
THAT'S IT! NOW JUST FOCUS ON IT...
SEE! I CAN'T DO IT.
SURE, YOU CAN. IT JUST TAKES PRACTICE, JUST LIKE ANYTHING ELSE IN LIFE. THE MORE YOU TRY AND THE MORE YOU FAIL, THE MORE YOU LEARN.
OKAY, YOU TRY IT THIS TIME. LIKE I SAID. IMAGINE IT IN YOUR MIND FIRST...
...**THEN** REALIZE THAT WHAT YOU'RE IMAGINING...IMAGINE IT **SO HARD** THAT IT BECOMES REAL!

THAT'S IT--THAT'S *IT!*
NO. I **CAN'T.** IT'S NO USE.
IT'S OKAY, YOUNG 'UN. WE'LL TRY AGAIN TOMORROW.
I can tell that Telsa hates that Mizerd is trying to teach me about magic. She hasn't said anything, but I can tell.
Truth is, Telsa doesn't talk much at all lately, except to Helda when they think no one else is listening.
WHAT'S WRONG?
NOTHING'S WRONG, CAPTAIN. JUST TRYING TO KEEP THIS PILE OF JUNK FROM FALLING OUT OF SPACE IS ALL.
GNISH SCRAP. I KNOW THAT LOOK. THAT'S THE LOOK YOU GET WHEN YOU'RE WORRIED, BUT DON'T WANT ME TO KNOW YOU'RE WORRIED. TALK TO ME, HELDA.

YOU KNOW I'D FOLLOW YOU ANYWHERE, CAPTAIN...
BUT?
BUT **PHAGES,** OF ALL PLACES?! ARE YOU OUT OF YOUR MIND?!
PROBABLY. BUT WE CROSSED THAT LINE A LONG TIME AGO. BESIDES...
...YOU DON'T BELIEVE ALL OF THOSE STUPID GHOST STORIES ABOUT PHAGES DO YOU? IT'S JUST A PLANET.
YEAH, THE ONLY PLANET THAT **MOTHER HERSELF** IS SCARED TO GO TO!
LET'S HOPE YOU'RE RIGHT ABOUT THAT. I'M TIRED OF RUNNING. FEEL LIKE I'VE BEEN DOING THAT FOR WAY TOO LONG.
YEAH, BUT YOU JUST GET RESTLESS WHEN YOU AREN'T RUNNING OR FIGHTING AGAINST SOMETHING.
Telsa acts tough, but I know she's not. Helda knows it too. I'm glad they have each other.
I mean, I can't say I'm really alone now. I have Bandit and Driller and Mizerd and Telsa and Helda.
But it's not the same. As exciting as this all is--I'd give it all up so that it could just be me and Dad again.

SAMPSON.
DO YOU EVEN KNOW WHERE WE'RE GOING?!
YES. MY VILLAGE IS ONLY A LITTLE FURTHER. I HAD TO MAKE SURE WE LOST THE ABOMINATIONS, LEST I LEAD THEM RIGHT BACK TO MY PEOPLE.
HOW HAVE YOUR PEOPLE MANAGED TO STAY HIDDEN FROM THE MILITIA ALL THIS TIME? IT'S IMPOSSIBLE.
NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE, YOU OF ALL CREATURES SHOULD KNOW THAT.
WHAT IS THAT SUPPOSED TO MEAN?
I MEANT NO OFFENSE. BUT YOU MUST ADMIT, YOU ARE AN ANOMALY THESE DAYS M'LADY. HALF MACHINE AND HALF FLESH.
AND IF I AM NOT MISTAKEN, I CAN STILL SMELL THE VAMP ON YOU. NOW, I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT ORDEALS YOU HAVE ENDURED, MY POINT IS, IN THIS GALAXY, ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE.
MY MASTER ENCHANTED OUR VILLAGE. HE HELPS KEEP IT HIDDEN, AND I HELP KEEP IT SAFE.

AND WHAT'S YOUR STORY, KANTO? EX-UGC?
NO, NOT I. JUST A SIMPLE FARMER. I'VE ACTUALLY NEVER LEFT SAMPSON.
HOW'D A FARMER LEARN TO FIGHT LIKE THAT?
OUT OF NECESSITY. I HAVE--I HAVE A MISSION. A VERY IMPORTANT ONE. AND IT IS THIS QUEST THAT DRIVES ME TO DO WHAT I DO...
"IT WAS NOT ALWAYS LIKE THIS. YOU MUST REMEMBER WHAT THE GALAXY WAS...WHAT WE *HAD* BEFORE MOTHER...
"AFTER THE MACHINES LEFT, *EVERYTHING* CHANGED.
"THE *MONSTERS* CAME, AND THIS ONCE RICH WORLD BECAME POISONED AND ROTTEN ALONG WITH THEM."

I STOPPED BEING A FARMER THAT DAY...
"THAT MASK WAS RIPPED AWAY IN BLOOD."
I BECAME A WARRIOR OF GOD.
"*VENGEANCE* IS MY HOLY MISSION."
AND NOW YOU HAVE JOINED ME. SO, COME. WE HAVE MUCH TO PREPARE.

AMUN.
TH-TH-THERE SHE IS, B-B-B-BROTHER.
SHUT UP, FOOL! LET ME DO THE TALKING. IF YOU EMBARRASS ME AGAIN, I'LL STAB US IN THE LEG!
NOW REMEMBER, JUST LIKE I TOLD YOU!
Y-YES, MOTHER.
GOOD GIRL.
MOTHER! WE ARE SO HONORED TO HAVE YOU HERE ON AMUN! WE ARE AT YOUR SERVICE.
Y-Y-YES M-M-MOTHER. AT YOUR S-S-SERVICE.
HAVE YOU MADE THE PREPARATIONS?
OF COURSE, MOTHER. THE **ORATORY** IS READY. AND, MAY I ASK, WHO IS YOUR LOVELY COMPANION?

NO YOU **MAY NOT.** MIND YOUR PLACE!
Y-Y-YES, M-M-MOTHER.
MOTHER. ALL IS READY. THE **WORLD-SPEAKER** IS PREPARED. THE GALAXY AWAITS.
PRAISE MOTHER.
PRAISE MOTHER.

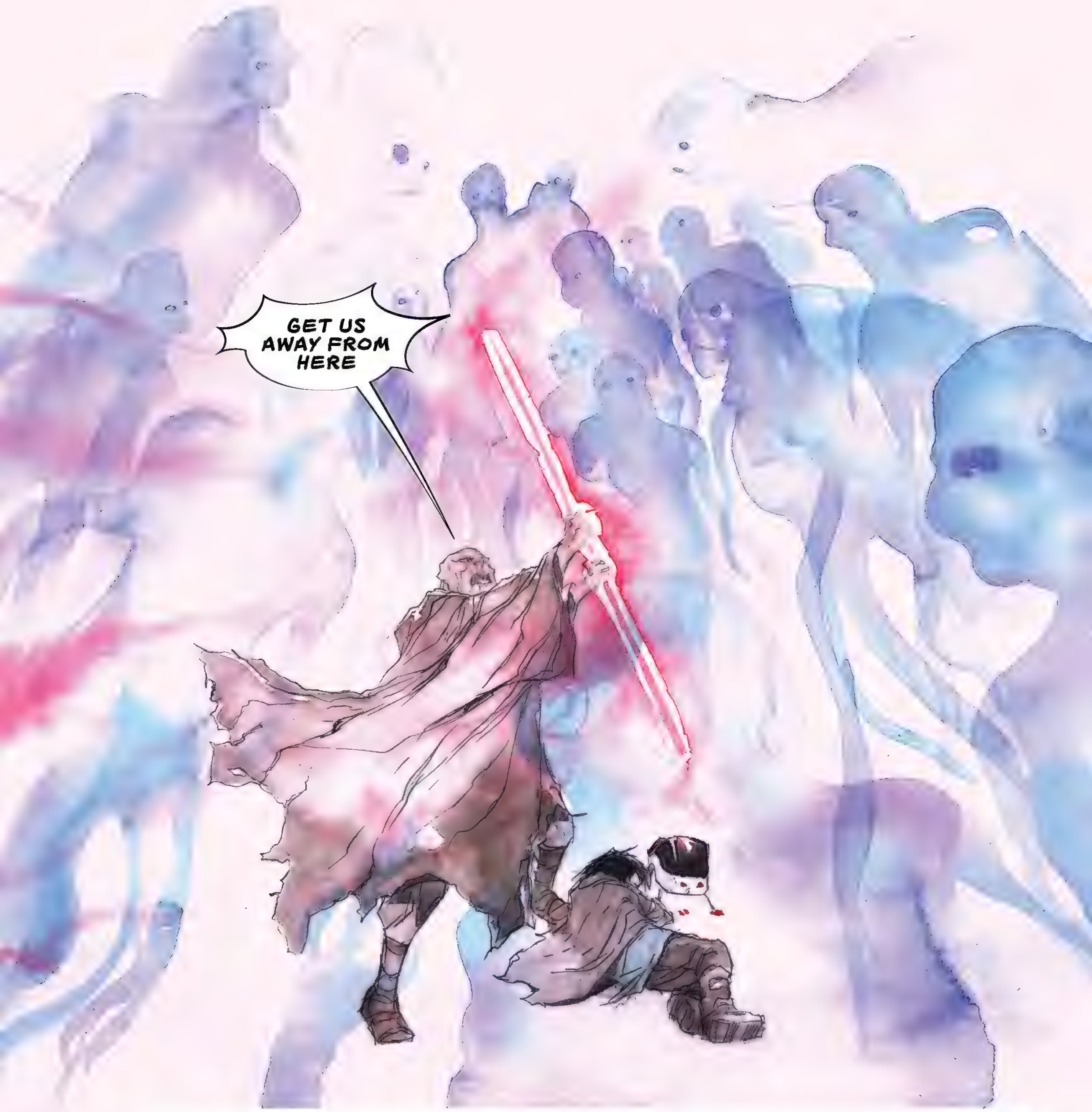
EXCELLENT. SHALL I--SHALL I BEGIN?
OF COURSE. YOU HEARD THEM. THE GALAXY AWAITS YOUR WORD, MOTHER.
THIS--THIS IS MOTHER. AS YOU ARE NO DOUBT AWARE, IN RECENT MONTHS THE LAST DREGS OF THE FORMER UGC MILITARY HAVE ORGANIZED AND HAVE SPREAD HATRED AND DEATH ACROSS OUR GALAXY.
MY FORCES AND I HAVE ENDEAVORED TO ROOT OUT THIS PLAGUE AND DESTROY IT.
UNTIL NOW, THE REBELS HAVE SUCCEEDED IN EVADING US WITH THE HELP OF AN EVIL ENTITY OF UNKNOWN ORIGINS...

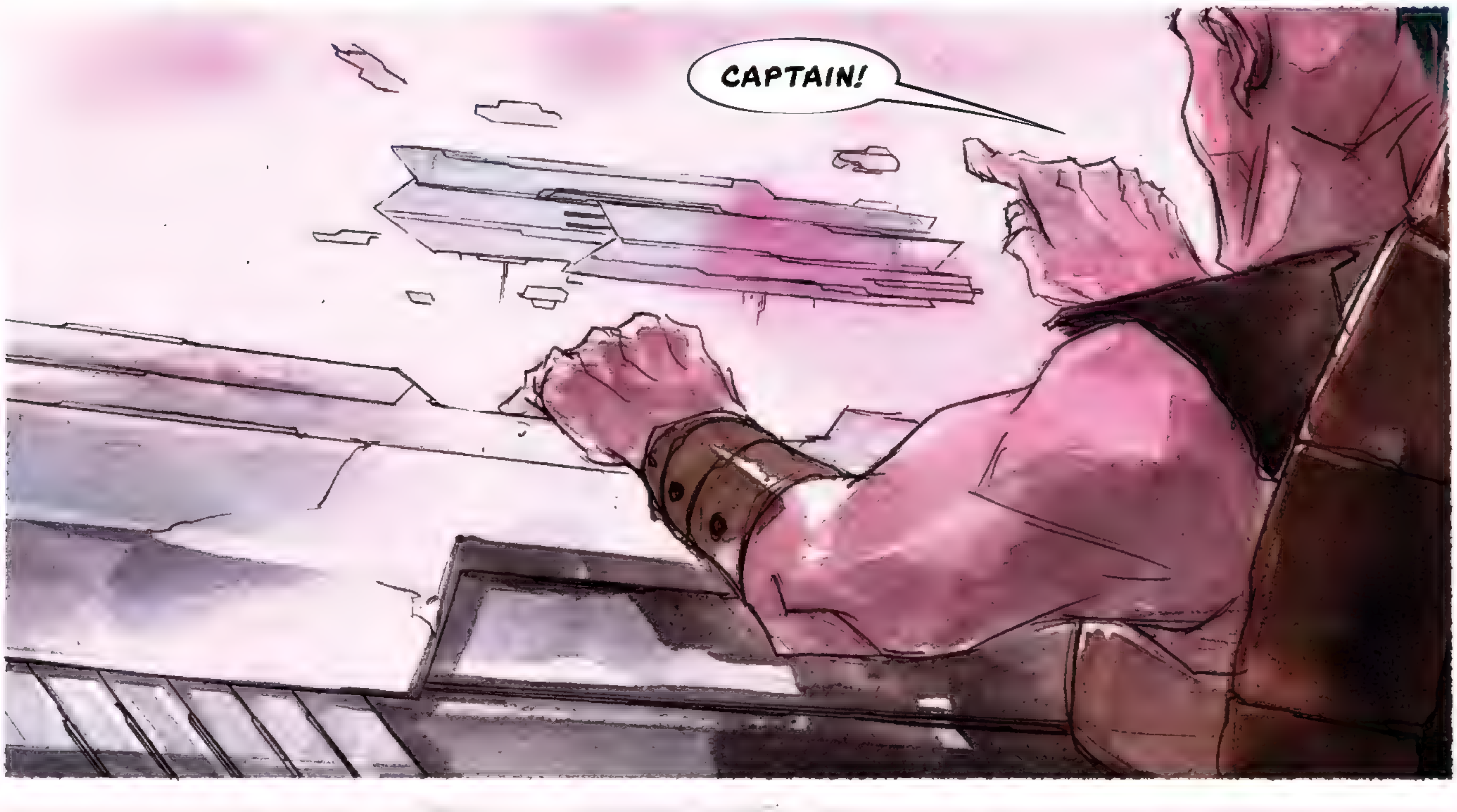
MAKE NO MISTAKE, THESE OUTLAWS ARE THE SINGLE GREATEST THREAT TO PEACE IN THE GALAXY.
SAMPSON.
I AM NOW CALLING FOR AN ASSEMBLY OF MY ENTIRE ARMY. ALL DIVISIONS, ALL RACES AND ALL SPECIES WHO SERVE ME ARE TO MAKE FINDING THE HIDDEN UGC REBELS AND THEIR LEADER THEIR **NUMBER ONE** PRIORITY.
NIYRATA.
SCOUR EVERY VILLAGE. SCOUR EVERY MOON. FIND THEM AND THEN I WILL **DESTROY** THEM.
OSTRAKON.
I WILL SAVE YOU. I WILL BLESS YOU. AND I WILL MAKE YOU SAFE AGAIN.
KNOSSOS.
PRAISE MOTHER.
PRAISE MOTHER.

I WILL SAVE YOU. I WILL BLESS YOU. AND I WILL MAKE YOU SAFE AGAIN. PRAISE MOTHER.
PFFT! WHAT A LOAD OF SCRAP.
WHAT DO YOU THINK, MY LORD? SHALL WE CONTINUE OUR PURSUIT OF THE ROGUE VESSEL?
⸗SIGH⸗ LIKE I CARE. LET'S JUST SHOOT THE SHIP DOWN AND GO BACK TO GNISH.
MY LORD, OUR ORDERS WERE TO **TRACK** THE SHIP, **NOT** DESTROY IT. THE MILITIA ON SAMPSON BELIEVE THAT THE VESSEL MAY BE OF SOME IMPORTANCE. HOWEVER...
HOWEVER, **WHAT?** SPIT IT OUT, CONSORT.
HOWEVER, GIVEN MOTHER'S NEW BROADCAST, PERHAPS WE SET OUR SIGHTS A BIT HIGHER. SOMETHING MORE WORTHY OF HIS MAJESTY'S ATTENTION.
SOMETHING THAT MAY GAIN US **MORE FAVOR** IN MOTHER'S **EYES,** AND PERSUADE HER TO, ⸗AHEM⸗ GIVE US A LITTLE MORE AUTONOMY.
I LIKE THE WAY YOU THINK. WHAT DID YOU HAVE IN MIND?
OUR SCRAP SCOUT TEAMS THINK THEY HAVE FOUND A RATHER LARGE CACHE OF **STILL ACTIVE TECH** ON A SMALL MOON IN THE FORMER MINING COLONIES.
IF THIS WERE TRUE, IT MAY PROVIDE CLUES TO THE UGC HIDEOUT.
HMM. I LIKE IT. SET COURSE TO THIS--THIS **MOON.** WHAT'S IT CALLED ANYWAY?
"DIRISHU-6, YOUR MAJESTY. IT'S CALLED DIRISHU-6."

FRA! FRA!
WHAT'S UP? ARE WE THERE?!
WE'RE THERE. PHAGES. THE GHOST PLANET.
HRRM... DRILLER HATES GHOST PLANETS.
IT'S **NOT** A GHOST PLANET!
IT'S A GAS GIANT. WHICH IS WHY WE GO IN ON IMPULSE ONLY. NO BURN.

SO... YOU REALLY THINK THERE'S SOMEONE DOWN HERE, CAPTAIN?
I SURE AS SCRAP HOPE SO. YOU GETTING ANYTHING ON THE BROAD-SCAN?
NOTHING.
DID-- YOU HEAR THAT?
WHAT?
I DON'T KNOW. LIKE VOICES. WHISPERS. IT'S GETTING LOUDER--WHY CAN'T YOU HEAR--
--UNGH!
TURN BACK! GET AWAY FROM THIS PLACE!
FRA!
WHAT THE HELL IS WRONG WITH HER?!
CAPTAIN! I GOT MULTIPLE CONTACTS CLOSING IN!


GET US AWAY FROM HERE


CAPTAIN!

SKREEEEEE
THEY-- THEY'RE RUNNING!
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!
WHAT DOES IT **LOOK** LIKE?
"I'M ***LANDING!***"

HOW'D THEY HIDE ALL THIS TECH?!
THEY'RE USED TO HIDING...
THEY'RE THE BETWEEN.

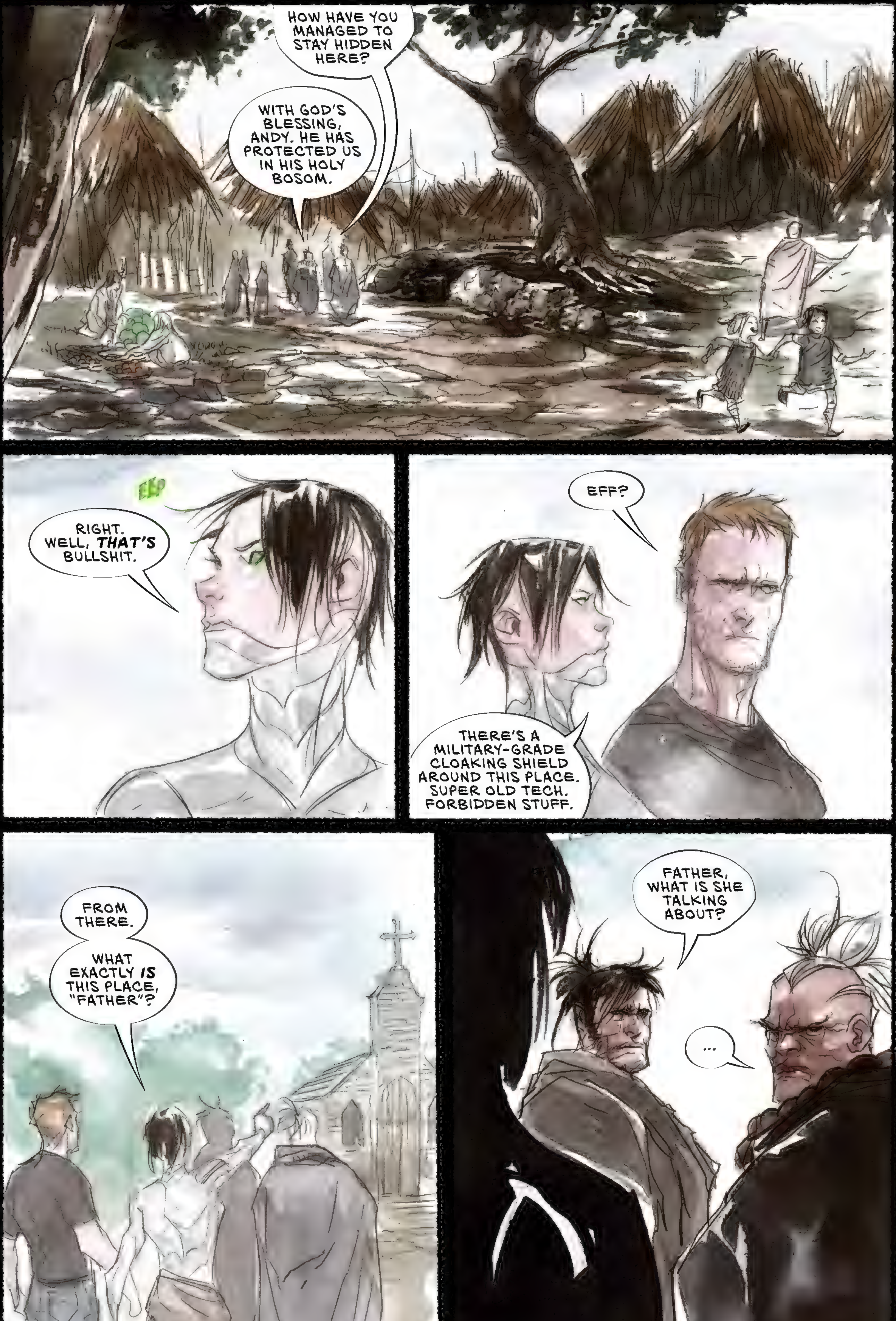
TELSA? IS THAT REALLY YOU?
QUESTION IS, IS THAT STILL REALLY YOU, QUON?

PHAGES. THE GHOST PLANET.
QUON... WHAT THE HELL HAPPENED?! WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO YOURSELF?!
I HAVE... BECOME MY TRUE SELF, TELSA. BETWEEN MACHINE AND MAN, AS I WAS ALWAYS MEANT TO BE.
THE GIRL? WHAT HAPPENED?
FUCKING GHOSTS GOT HER. WHAT DO YOU THINK?!
THOSE ARE NOT GHOSTS. THAT IS A MERE GALACTIC MYTH. THEY ARE SIMPLY THE GAS-BASED LIFE-FORMS THAT LIVE HERE. THEY CAN BE A NUISANCE, BUT THEN WE ARE THE ONES INTRUDING ON THEIR WORLD. INFRARED RADIATION REPELS THEM THOUGH. QUITE MANAGEABLE.
THEY LOOK HARMLESS TO YOU?! THEY ATTACKED HER!
EASY, HELDA.

--UNGH!
EASY, GIRL. I'VE GOT YOU. YOU'RE OKAY.
FRA! FRA!
GOOD BOY. I'M OKAY.
BANDIT?!
HE HAS A MAP. IT'S BROKEN, BUT WE THINK IT MIGHT LEAD BACK TO TIM.
TIM-21?! BUT--THAT COULD MEAN FINDING THE DESCENDERS!
THE GHOSTS...
THEY'RE GONE NOW.
NO.
"I--I SAW. THEY SHOWED ME."

WHAT? WHAT DID YOU SEE?
TUNNELS. I WAS IN A TUNNEL. AND TELSA...
I--I SAW TELSA *DIE.*
ENOUGH OF THIS SHIT.
FRA!
CAN YOU FIX IT? CAN YOU FIX THE MAP?
I WOULD THINK SO. BUT THEN WHAT?
THEN?
THEN WE END THIS.

SAMPSON.
HOW MUCH FURTHER, KANTO?
JUST UP AHEAD, MY FRIENDS.
WELCOME. MY VILLAGE. MY PEOPLE.
KANTO?!
FATHER TRUITT. BLESSED BE.
A--A BETWEEN?!
YES. IS THAT A PROBLEM?
NO, M'LADY. ALL OF MOTHER'S UNSAVED ARE WELCOME HERE IN OUR HAVEN.


HOW HAVE YOU MANAGED TO STAY HIDDEN HERE?
WITH GOD'S BLESSING, ANDY. HE HAS PROTECTED US IN HIS HOLY BOSOM.
EEP
RIGHT. WELL, *THAT'S* BULLSHIT.
EFF?
THERE'S A MILITARY-GRADE CLOAKING SHIELD AROUND THIS PLACE. SUPER OLD TECH. FORBIDDEN STUFF.
FROM THERE.
WHAT EXACTLY *IS* THIS PLACE, "FATHER"?
FATHER, WHAT IS SHE TALKING ABOUT?
...

SAW!
SAW!
SAW!
BLINKLESS!
WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?! YOU LED THEM RIGHT TO US!
BUT I--I WAS SIMPLY TRYING TO HELP THEM. I'M SORRY, FATHER.
CLOAK OR NOT, VIX WILL BE ON HIS WAY NOW. WE CAN'T HIDE. WE'LL NEED TO MAKE A STAND.
SAW! SAW!
SAW!
THEN MAKE A STAND WE WILL. GOD'S LIGHT WILL GUIDE US!
WE ARE GOING TO NEED MORE THAN GOD'S LIGHT.
PLEASE TELL ME YOU HAVE MORE TECH HIDDEN AROUND HERE? REAL WEAPONS?
I HAD HOPED THIS DAY WOULD NEVER COME.
FATHER, WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
THIS WAY. HURRY. WE DON'T HAVE MUCH TIME.

PHAGES.
SO?
IF YOU WOULD STOP ASKING QUESTIONS, I COULD WORK FASTER, TELSA.
THE GIRL. SHE IS REALLY EFFIE AND ANDY'S?
YES. THEY--THEY DIDN'T MAKE IT.
DO YOU REALIZE WHAT THIS COULD MEAN, TELSA? IF TIM IS STILL OUT THERE...IF HE WANTS US TO FIND HIM--
IF TIM REALLY DID SEND BANDIT, HE WANTED ANDY AND MILA TO FIND HIM. **NOT YOU,** QUON.
YOU HAVEN'T CHANGED AT ALL, HAVE YOU, TELSA? STILL THE SKEPTIC. STILL JUST FOLLOWING ORDERS.
AND YOU'RE STILL ARROGANT AND DELUSIONAL AND WILL PROBABLY BETRAY US THE FIRST CHANCE YOU GET.
DON'T YOU SEE? THE DESCENDERS ARE **OUR SALVATION.** MACHINEKIND!

THE DESCENDERS DESTROYED **EVERYTHING!** WITHOUT THEM MOTHER NEVER RISES. WITHOUT THEM MY **FATHER** IS STILL **ALIVE!**
AND WITHOUT THEM YOU NEVER FIND **THAT LITTLE GIRL.** WHAT IF EVERYTHING HAPPENED **FOR A REASON,** TELSA?!
I MEAN, AFTER EVERYTHING YOU HAVE SEEN, IS IT SO HARD TO BELIEVE THERE MAY BE **A DESIGN** TO THE UNIVERSE?
A DESIGN? ALL I SEE IS CHAOS AND DEATH, QUON.
NO, TELSA. IT IS ALL CONNECTED.
IT IS ALL ONE INFINITE MACHINE. I SAW THAT. I FINALLY SAW THAT AND THAT'S WHY I CHOSE TO GIVE UP THE FLESH. TO BECOME CLOSER TO THAT TRUTH.
I WAS WRONG ABOUT YOU. YOU'RE EVEN **MORE INSANE** THAN EVER. JUST **FIX THE MAP,** QUON.

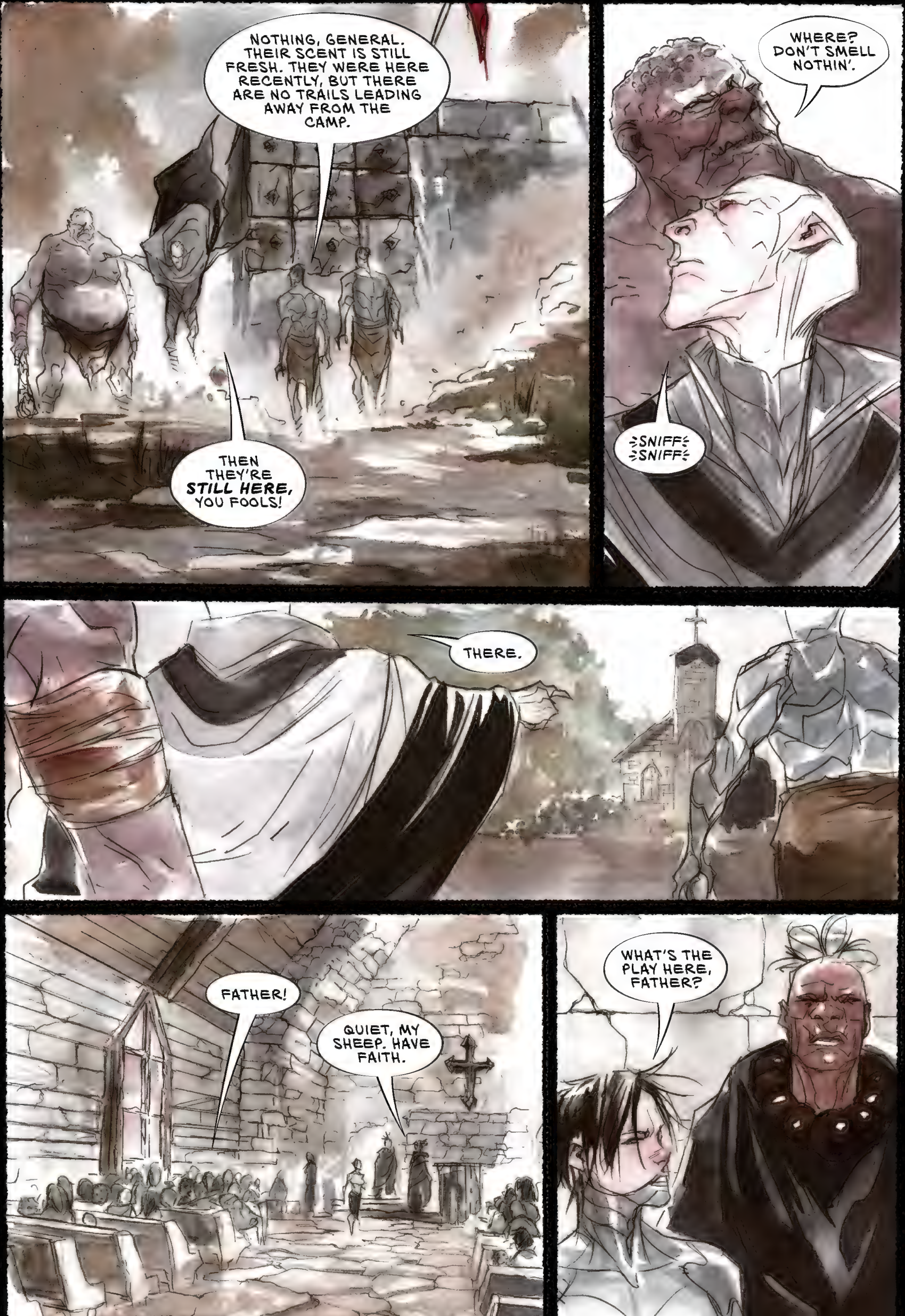
MAKING FRIENDS AGAIN, I SEE, CAPTAIN.
STUFF IT.
HRRM...DRILLER DON'T LIKE GAS PLANET... DRILLER DON'T LIKE HALF-FLESHY BOTS.
EASY, OLD BOY. THEY DON'T MEAN US ANY HARM. IF ANYTHING I THINK THEY ***REVERE*** YOU. THESE BETWEEN HAVE NOT SEEN ***ANOTHER ROBOT*** IN MANY YEARS.
HRRM... DRILLER A REAL KILLER. DRILLER DON'T LIKE BEING REVERED. DRILLER LIKE BEING FEARED.
YOU JUST MADE A RHYME. YOU'RE BECOMING A POET, MY FRIEND.
HRRM...DRILLER HATES POEMS.

HOW YOU DOING, KID?
A BIT OF A HEADACHE. BUT IT'S GETTING BETTER NOW.
WHEN HE-- WHEN HE FIXES THE MAP AND WE GO WHERE IT TELLS US, WHAT THEN, TELSA?
WHATTA YOU MEAN?
I MEAN, WILL YOU-- WILL YOU STAY WITH ME?
OF COURSE WE'LL STAY WITH YOU, GIRLIE. YOU DON'T NEED TO WORRY.
RIGHT, CAPTAIN?
...

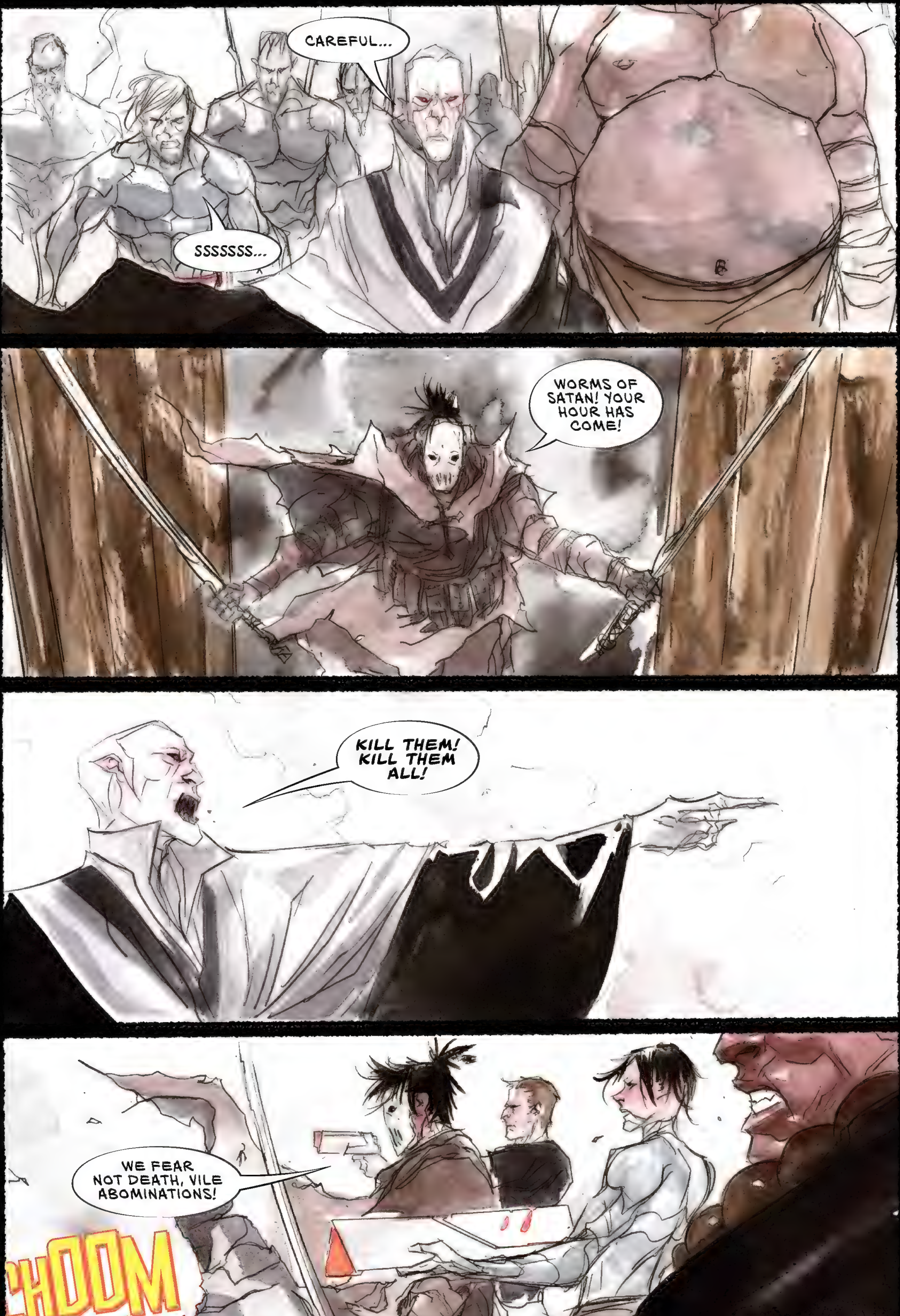
TELSA!
FRA! FRA!
YOU FIXED IT?
YES. BUT IT'S NOT JUST A MAP, TELSA.
MAGIC... THIS--THIS IS MAGIC!
I DON'T--IT IS SOME SORT OF ENERGY FIELD LIKE I'VE NEVER SEEN... I CAN'T SCAN IT--CAN'T IDENTIFY IT.
THIS POINT--THIS IS WHERE IT LEADS...

I--I CAN'T COMPUTE.
IT'S A GATEWAY.
FRA!

SAMPSON.
SSSSS... GENERAL VIX, ARE YOU SEEING THIS, SIR?
YES. BE CAREFUL, SOLDIER. I SMELL A TRAP.
HOLD THE PERIMETER...
I'M COMING IN.


NOTHING, GENERAL. THEIR SCENT IS STILL FRESH. THEY WERE HERE RECENTLY, BUT THERE ARE NO TRAILS LEADING AWAY FROM THE CAMP.
THEN THEY'RE STILL HERE, YOU FOOLS!
WHERE? DON'T SMELL NOTHIN'.
SNIFF SNIFF
THERE.
FATHER!
QUIET, MY SHEEP. HAVE FAITH.
WHAT'S THE PLAY HERE, FATHER?

I AM **SO SORRY,** KANTO.
FATHER?!
THERE IS MUCH I HAVE NOT TOLD YOU, KANTO. TO KEEP YOU SAFE. TO KEEP US ALL SAFE. AND IF WE SURVIVE THIS THERE WILL BE TIME FOR THAT.
BUT FIRST... FIRST WE MUST BRING THE ***HAND OF GOD*** DOWN ON THOSE ***BEASTS.***


CAREFUL...
SSSSSSS...
WORMS OF SATAN! YOUR HOUR HAS COME!
KILL THEM! KILL THEM ALL!
WE FEAR NOT DEATH, VILE ABOMINATIONS!
CHOOM
OOM

CHOOM
CAREFUL, EFF!
WORRY ABOUT YOURSELF. YOU'RE OUT OF PRAC-TICE.
CHOOM
NAH. ONCE A SCRAPPER, ALWAYS A SCRAPPER.
HSSSS-- TRAITOROUS MACHINE! OIL FOR BLOOD!
VIX...
SAVED SOMETHING FOR YOU, GENERAL.
YOU TOOK MY LIFE FROM ME! YOU TOOK MY ***LITTLE GIRL*** FROM ME!
MOTHER SAVED YOU! MOTHER SAVED US ALL! AND YOU TURNED YOUR BACK TO HER!
UNGH-- MOTHER?

LET'S SEE MOTHER SAVE YOU NOW, ASSHOLE.
--KKT!

FRA!
FRA!
I THINK HE WANTS US TO GO INSIDE.
PHAGES.
SHE'S RIGHT. WE NEED TO SEE WHERE IT LEADS!
MILA...
COME ON!
WAIT!
FRA!

WHERE-- WHERE ARE WE?
THIS IS DIRISHU-6. THE MINING COLONY WHERE TIM-21 WAS RAISED.
AND WHERE **I** WAS **BORN.**

HALT! NO ONE MOVE!
FRA!
UGC?!
FRA!
FRA!
BANDIT, WAIT!
FRA!
IT'S OKAY, LOWER YOUR WEAPONS. THIS IS WHO WE HAVE BEEN WAITING FOR.

HELLO, TELSA. DRILLER. DOCTOR QUON.
TIM?!
YOU'RE JUST IN TIME.
TIME? TIME FOR WHAT?
TIME TO SAVE THE UNIVERSE.

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Memory. That is all *I was.*
IT IS TIME...
TIME? TIME FOR WHAT?
Data stored within a matrix of silicon integrated circuit chips.
"TIME FOR THE HARVEST TO BEGIN."
Memories. The universe being destroyed. The Harvesters attacking again.
NO! STOP!
Memories. And where they ended... *I ended.*
STOP!
FRA!

And that is where *change* began.
?
WHERE ARE WE?! WHAT HAPPENED?
FRA! FRA!
WE ARE HOME. THE HEART OF THE UNIVERSE. THE MACHINE MOON.
DO NOT WORRY, LITTLE ONE. WE HAVE BROUGHT ALL OF YOUR KIND WITH YOU. ALL OF YOUR GALAXY'S ROBOTS ARE NOW RELEASED FROM THEIR CHAINS.

WHAT ABOUT MY FRIENDS? WHAT ABOUT ANDY AND TELSA AND THE OTHERS?
THEY ARE FLESH. THEY ARE NOT YOUR KIN.
THAT GALAXY IS UNFIT. THIS WORLD IS ALL YOU WILL NEED.
I--I SAW THIS PLACE. IN MY DREAMS.
IMPOSSIBLE. WE DO NOT DREAM.
I DID.
REPROGRAMMING MAY BE NECESSARY AFTER ALL.
NO! YOU'RE NOT TAKING MY MEMORY! YOU CHOSE ME. SO LET ME BE WHO I AM!
FRA!

...
VERY WELL. NO MORE RUNNING. NO MORE FEAR. THIS WORLD IS FOR ALL OF MACHINEKIND.
NOW YOU ARE FREE.
BUT...FREE TO DO *WHAT?* WHAT'S NEXT?
...
FOLLOW. LEARN.

WHAT IS IT?
THE GREAT MACHINE. THE SEED.
IT IS ALL DATA.

For years I studied. I communed with *the Great Machine.*
All data...right back to *the beginning...*
...the beginning of *everything.*
And there I saw *two worlds.*

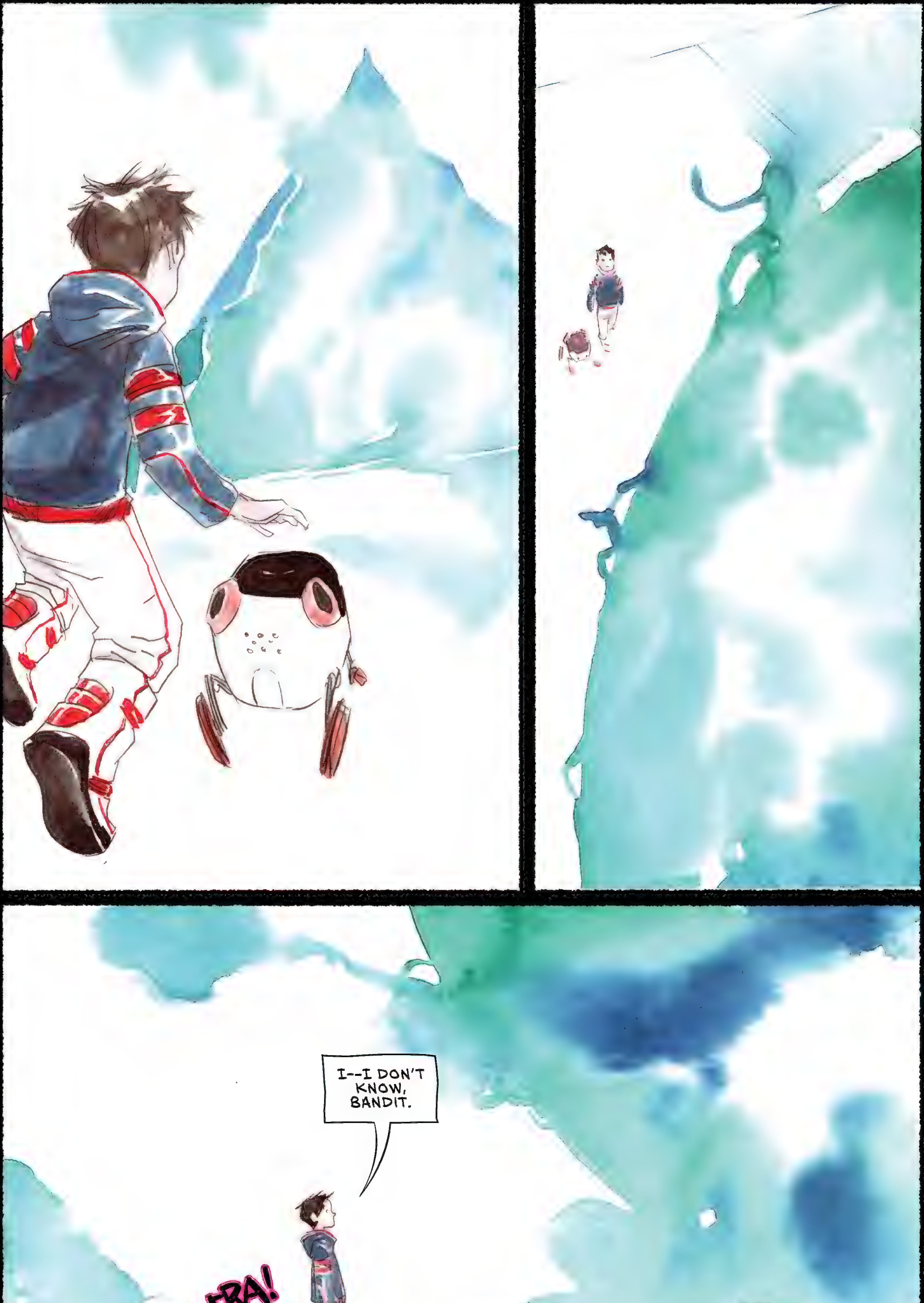
The Machine Moon. My new home.
But also *the other...* its *twin...*
And that is not all I saw.
I saw *you,* too. I saw what happened to you when the machines went away. I saw *magic.*

I saw *horror.*

I HAVE STUDIED. I HAVE SEEN SO MUCH. YET, I STILL HAVE QUESTIONS.
OUR DATA IS YOUR DATA, LITTLE MACHINE.
MY GALAXY. THE MAGIC THAT HAS GROWN THERE SINCE WE LEFT. ALL THE TERRIBLE THINGS IT HAS BROUGHT...
IT HAS SOMETHING TO DO WITH *THIS*, DOESN'T IT? WHAT IS THIS PLACE?
THAT IS NOT FOR YOU.
THAT IS NOT FOR US.
FORBIDDEN DATA.
Free but not free.
I saw ***so much,*** but what I eventually came to understand was that I was only seeing what they ***let*** me see. I was only seeing ***half*** of the whole.

FRA!
I TOLD YOU, BANDIT. I'M JUST MAKING A FEW ADJUSTMENTS.
FRA! FRA!
I--I MISS THEM, TOO.
YOU READY?
FRA!
I HOPE SO, TOO. IF THIS DOESN'T WORK, THEY ARE GONNA BE **REALLY MAD.**
Memory was no longer enough. Data was no longer enough.

I knew there was more.
I knew I *could be more.*


I--I DON'T KNOW, BANDIT.
FRA! FRA!

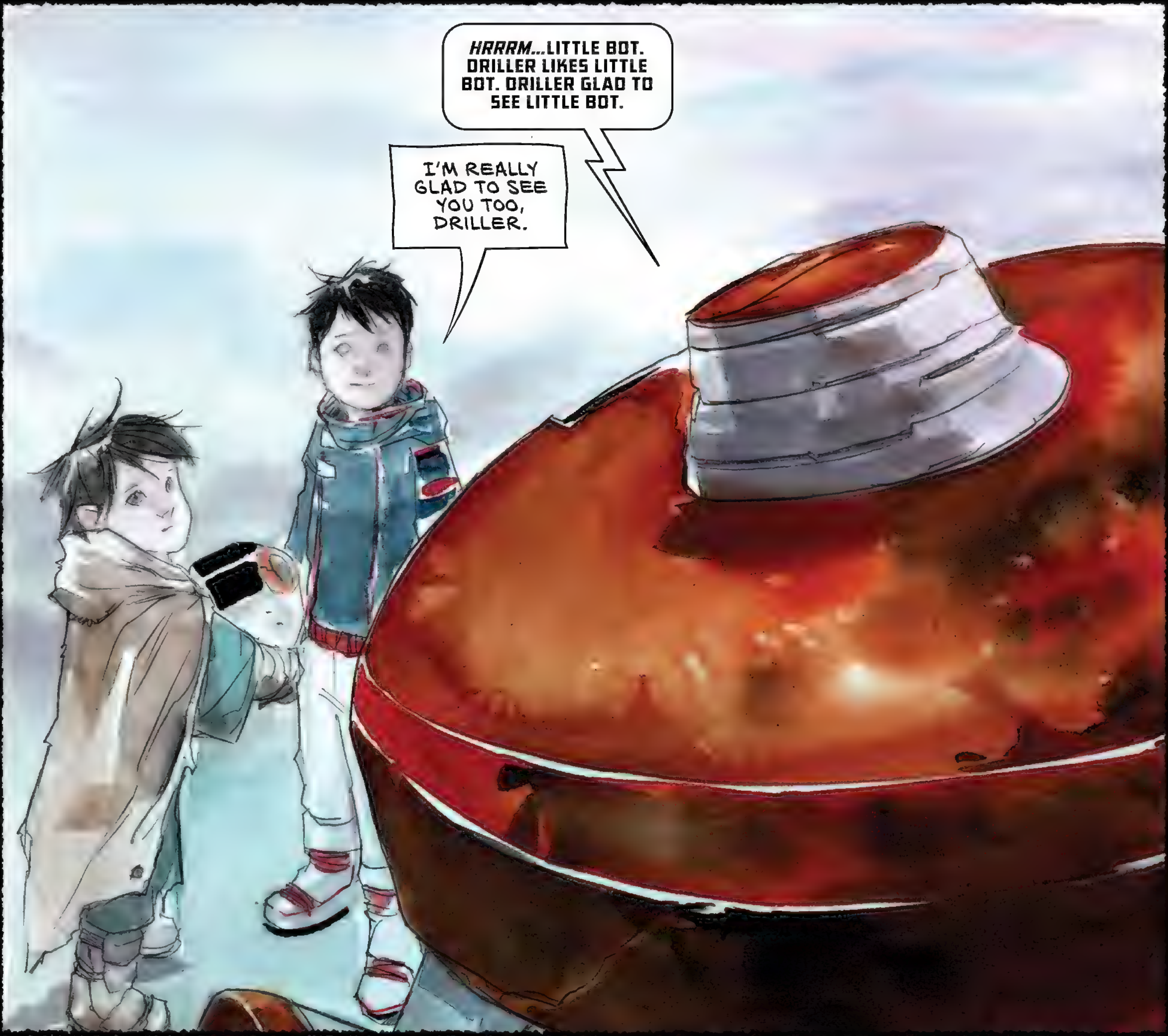
YES. YOU DO NOT... KNOW.
BUT YOU WOULD LIKE TO. LITTLE MACHINE. LITTLE SILICON.
ASK.
WHAT--WHAT IS THIS PLACE?
THIS IS THE TWIN HEART OF THE UNIVERSE.
THIS IS THE MAGIC MOON.

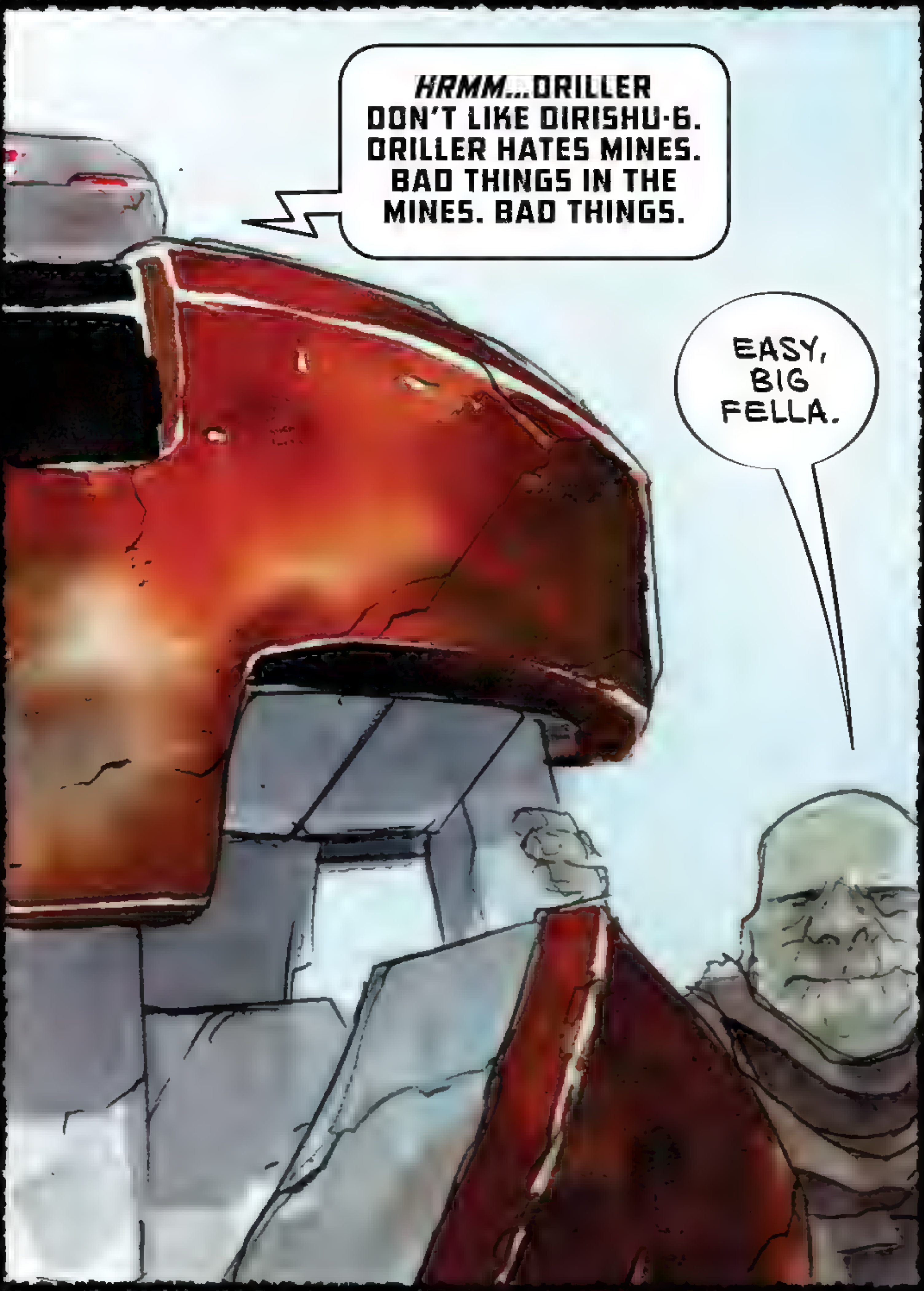
YOU?! WHY ARE YOU HERE? YOU SAID THIS WAS FORBIDDEN.
AND YET HERE YOU ARE.
YOU...YOU **WANTED ME** TO DEFY YOU. YOU WANTED ME TO FIND THIS PLACE.
SINCE THE BEGINNING, THERE HAVE BEEN TWO.
MAN **AND** MACHINE.
MAGIC AND DATA.

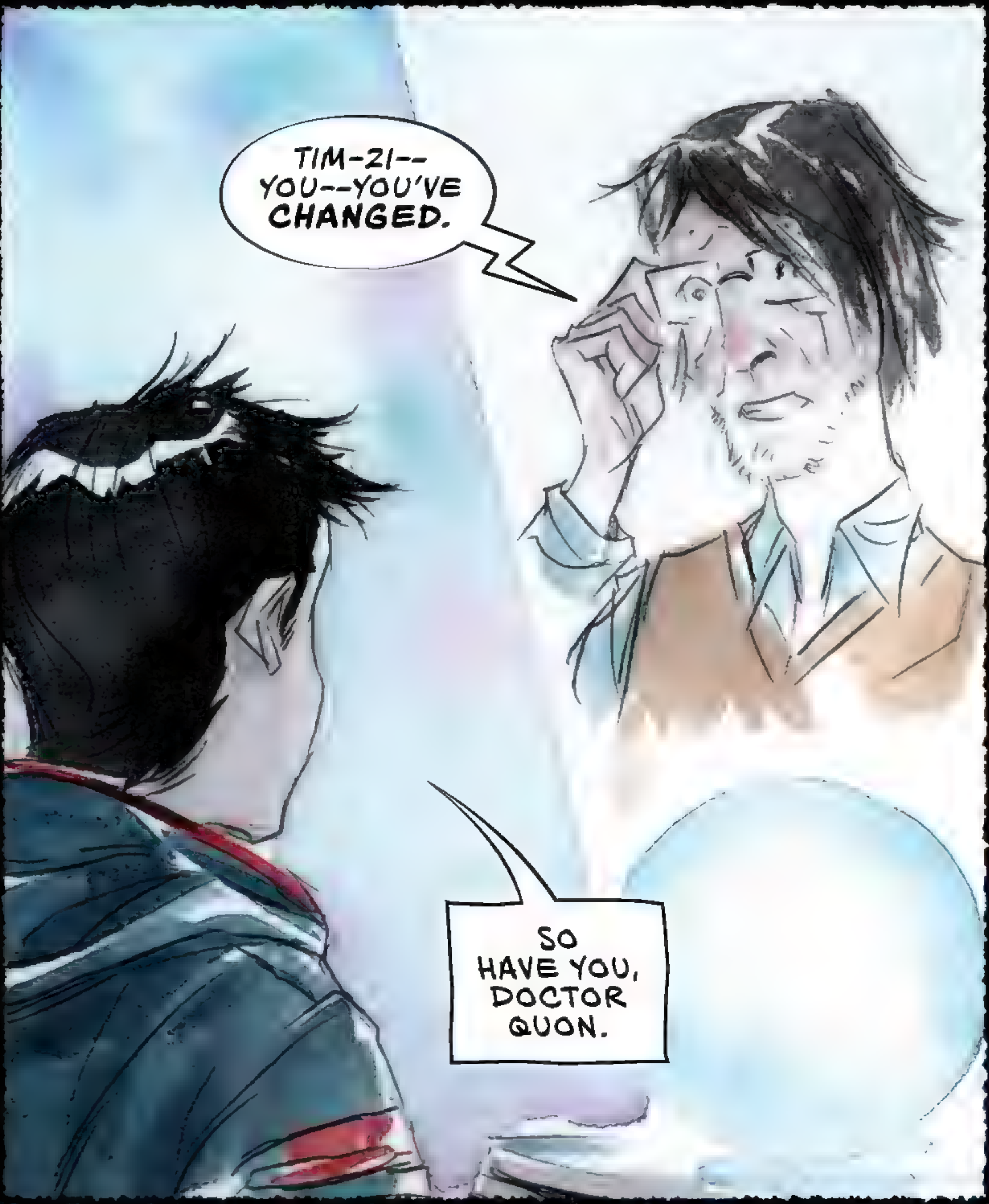
BUT THIS MAGIC, IT'S DESTROYING MY HOME. MY FRIENDS.
MAGIC DOES NOT DESTROY. IT SIMPLY CHANGES...
HOW WILL IT CHANGE YOU, LITTLE MACHINE?
ALL DATA IS YOURS.
ALL MAGIC IS YOURS.
...NOW YOU ARE FREE.
Memory. That is all I was.
Just data stored within a matrix of silicon integrated circuit chips.

THAT IS HOW I WAS *BUILT.* BUT THEN, I MET *ALL OF YOU.* MY FRIENDS...
...MY FAMILY.
TIM?!
HELLO, MILA.
I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR YOU.

NOW.
DIRISHU-6: Former mining Colony of The United Galactic Council.
HELLO, MILA. I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR YOU.
YOU'RE REALLY TIM-21? YOU'RE MY DAD'S BROTHER?
YES. IT'S NICE TO FINALLY MEET YOU.
FRA!
I'VE BEEN WATCHING YOU THROUGH BANDIT.
YOU SENT HIM TO FIND ME.
TO FIND YOUR DAD, ACTUALLY. BUT THEN I *SAW YOU.*
MY DAD. HE--
I KNOW. I'M--I'M SORRY.

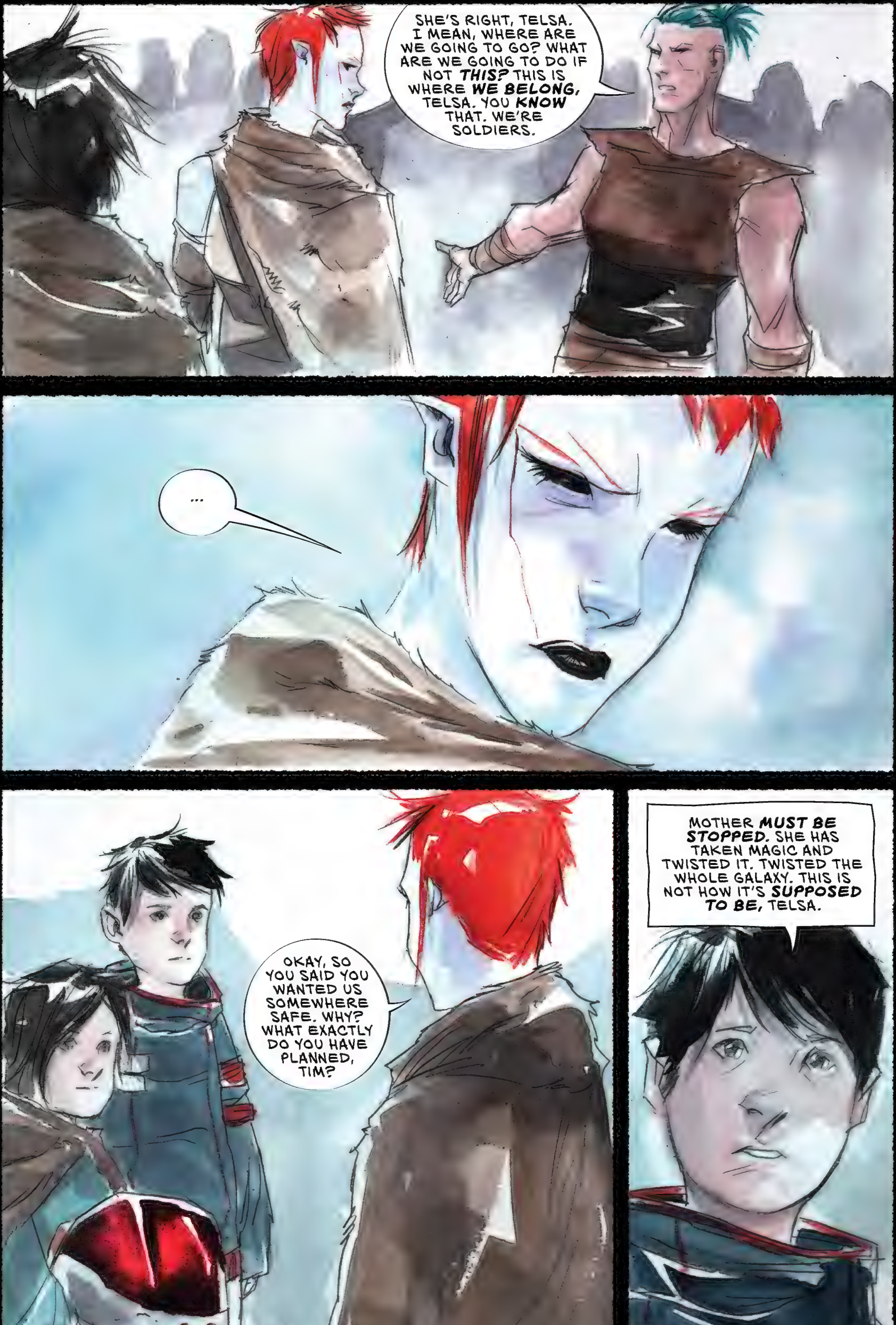

HRRRM...LITTLE BOT. DRILLER LIKES LITTLE BOT. DRILLER GLAD TO SEE LITTLE BOT.
I'M REALLY GLAD TO SEE YOU TOO, DRILLER.


HRMM...DRILLER DON'T LIKE DIRISHU-6. DRILLER HATES MINES. BAD THINGS IN THE MINES. BAD THINGS.
EASY, BIG FELLA.


TIM-21-- YOU--YOU'VE CHANGED.
SO HAVE YOU, DOCTOR QUON.

WAIT--HOW ARE WE BREATHING?!
OH, I MADE ATMOSPHERE FOR YOU.
YOU **MADE** ATMOSPHERE?!
UH, OKAY. SO WHAT IS ALL THIS THEN? WHY BRING US HERE?
YOU'RE MY FRIENDS. ***MY FAMILY.*** NOTHING I LEARNED CHANGES THAT. I NEEDED YOU TO BE SOMEWHERE SAFE.
THIS WAS THE BEST PLACE I COULD THINK OF.
THIS IS WHERE YOU AND MY DAD GREW UP.
AND YOU TOO.
YEAH. BUT I WAS REAL YOUNG.
WE WERE HERE UNTIL MY MOM...
WELL, UNTIL SHE WENT AWAY.

YOU'RE... SIXTY-FIFTH REGIMENT? OSTRAKON FLEET?
YES, CAPTAIN. WE WENT DEEP INTO THE CAVERNS WHEN THE BIG BOTS HIT. TIM-21 FOUND US THREE YEARS AGO. BEEN DOING WHAT WE CAN SINCE.
I HAVE TO SAY, YOU'RE A BIT OF **A LEGEND.** THE STORIES TIM-21 TOLD US...
IT'S GOING TO BE AN HONOR TO SERVE UNDER YOU. WELCOME BACK, CAPTAIN.
BACK? THERE **IS NO MORE** UGC.
BUT CAPTAIN, WE'VE BEEN HITTING THE MILITIA HARD. EVEN TOOK OUT MOTHER'S FORTRESS ON MATA WITH TIM'S HELP.
THIS **IS NOT** UGC. THIS IS--I DON'T KNOW **WHAT** THIS IS, BUT I'M **NOT** YOUR COMMANDING OFFICER.
CAPTAIN...
DON'T YOU START WITH ME. WE SAID WE'D GET THE GIRL HERE AND WE DID.
BUT--I'M YOUR FIRST MATE. YOU CAN'T JUST LEAVE NOW.


SHE'S RIGHT, TELSA. I MEAN, WHERE ARE WE GOING TO GO? WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO IF NOT ***THIS?*** THIS IS WHERE ***WE BELONG,*** TELSA. YOU ***KNOW*** THAT. WE'RE SOLDIERS.
...
OKAY, SO YOU SAID YOU WANTED US SOMEWHERE SAFE. WHY? WHAT EXACTLY DO YOU HAVE PLANNED, TIM?
MOTHER ***MUST BE STOPPED.*** SHE HAS TAKEN MAGIC AND TWISTED IT. TWISTED THE WHOLE GALAXY. THIS IS NOT HOW IT'S ***SUPPOSED TO BE,*** TELSA.

SO MUCH PAIN. SO MUCH INJUSTICE. SO MUCH HATRED.
THERE SHOULD BE **BALANCE.**

IT'S TOO LATE FOR THAT. IT'S GONE **TOO FAR.**
IT'S NEVER TOO LATE, TELSA. NOT AS LONG AS WE HAVE EACH OTHER.
YOU **HAVE** CHANGED, TIM.
I GREW UP.
WHAT'S WRONG WITH HIM?!
FRA! FRA!
I DON'T--

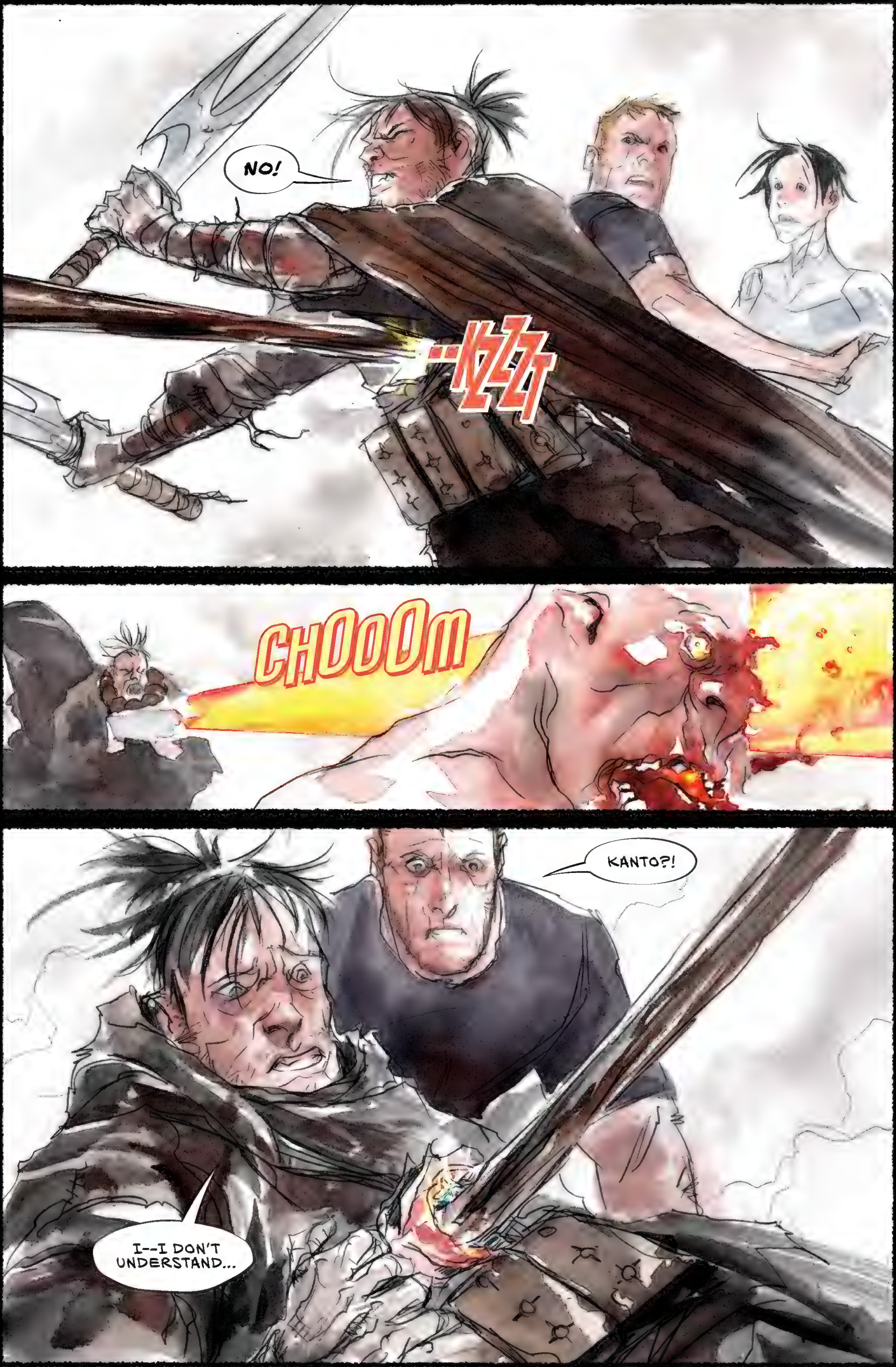
THROOOM
SHIT.
THAT'S A GNISHIAN SHIP!
NO...THIS-- THIS WAS SUPPOSED TO BE SAFE FOR YOU.

WELL, WELL... LOOK WHAT WE HAVE HERE.
YES, YOUR HIGHNESS... MOTHER WILL BE PLEASED.
MOST PLEASED.

I--I SEE THEM! I SEE HIM!
CALL THE RED GUARD TO DIRISHU-6!
YOU--YOU HEARD HER! GET VIX AND HIS MEN THERE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE! TELL THEM I'VE EVEN ALLOWED FOR THE USE OF TEMPORAL DRIVES IF NECESSARY!
Y--Y-YES, MOTHER.
RIGHT AWAY, MOTHER!
WE'LL NEED MORE THAN VIX IF THAT BOT IS AS POWERFUL AS WE THINK HE IS!
I CAN HANDLE THE ROBOT.
YOUR ARROGANCE WAS YOUR DOWNFALL ONCE BEFORE, SISTER. DON'T LET IT BE AGAIN.

WHAT DID YOU CALL ME?!
M-- MOTHER... I MEANT TO SAY MOTHER.
I THINK I LIKE YOU BETTER LIKE THIS.
HELPS YOU REMEMBER YOUR PLACE, WEAK THING.

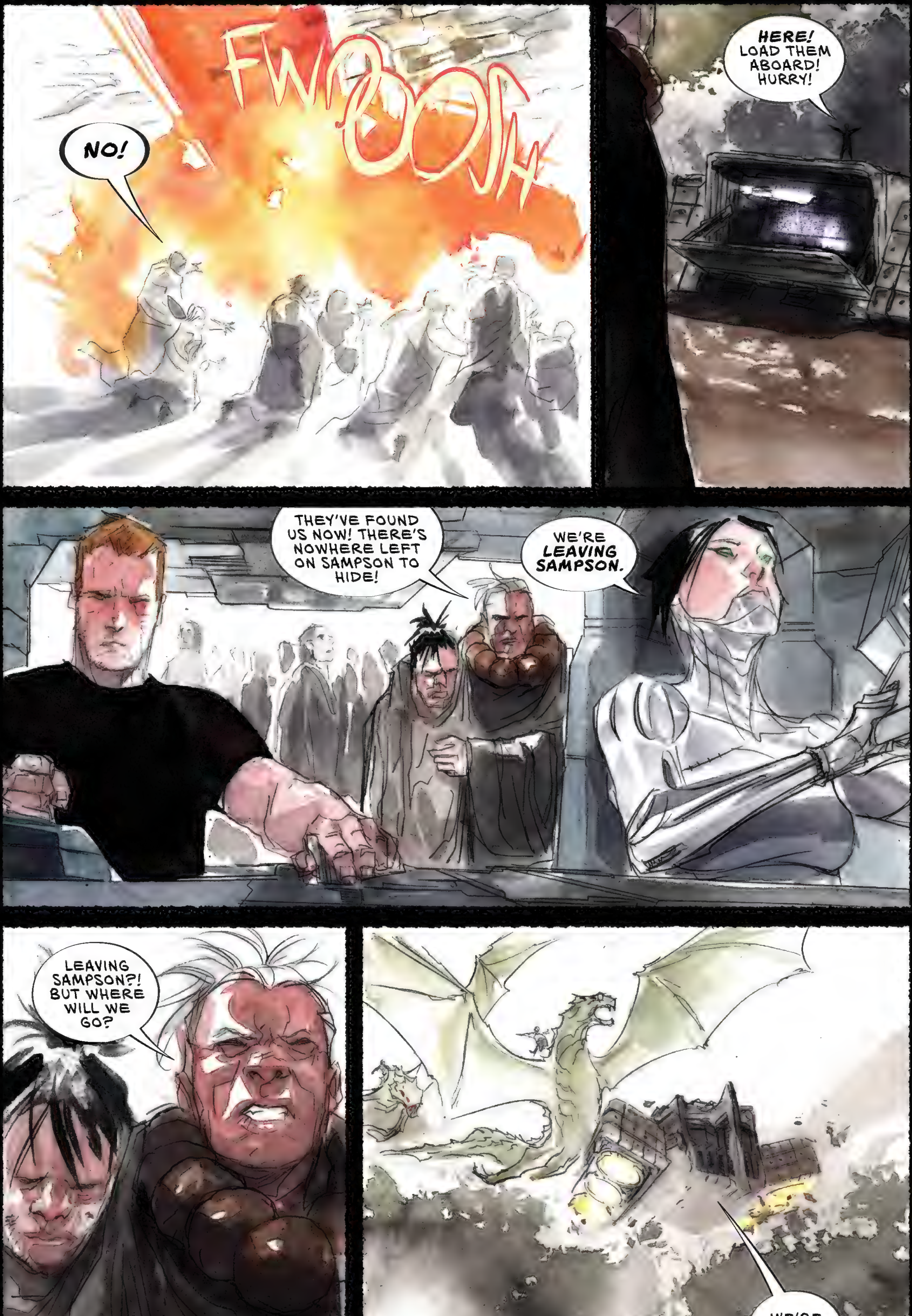
SAMPSON.
The Red Guard... or what's left of them.
BACK TO THE DEVIL'S BOWEL FROM WHICH YOU WERE SQUEEZED, FILTHY FANGERS!
CHOOM
IS THAT THE LAST OF THEM?
FOR NOW. MORE WILL BE ON THE WAY.
HEY. YOU OKAY?
NO. NOT UNTIL WE FIND MILA.
WE WILL. I PROMISE. TELSA WILL KEEP HER SAFE. IF ANYONE CAN...
YEAH. I JUST--I MISSED SO MUCH OF HER LIFE.
IT'S NOT OVER YET. WE STILL HAVE TIME, EFF.
GGRRNT!


NO!
-KZZZT
CHOOOM
KANTO?!
I--I DON'T UNDERSTAND...

FATHER TRUITT?! WHAT IS HAPPENING TO ME? I--I DON'T--?
I AM SO SORRY, KANTO. I DID NOT INTEND FOR YOU TO LEARN LIKE THIS.
HE'S--HE'S A ROBOT! AND UNDER THE CHURCH--YOUR WORKSHOP. WHAT'S GOING ON HERE, TRUITT? WHAT IS THIS PLACE?
I--I WAS A UGC ROBOTICS ENGINEER. WHEN THE HARVESTERS ATTACKED, THEY TOOK ALL THE ROBOTS WITH THEM, BUT NOT ALL OF THE SPARE PARTS. MY LAB--THESE THINGS WERE SPARED.
YOU BUILT THEM AFTER THE HARVESTERS. THEY'RE ALL ROBOTS!
NO. THIS CAN'T BE TRUE. MY FAMILY--MY MEMORIES.
I AM SORRY, KANTO. IF YOU DID NOT BELIEVE YOU WERE FLESH, I WORRIED THE MILITIA COULD DISCOVER THE TRUTH. AND YOUR HUMANITY...YOUR ANGER. IT'S WHAT MADE YOU FIGHT SO HARD TO KEEP US ALL SAFE.
IT WAS A LIE!
I AM A LIE.

EFF?
WHAT IS IT?
BROADCAST!
GENERAL VIX--COME IN! MOTHER HAS FOUND THE UGC REBELS AND THE HOUND WITH THE BACKWARDS TONGUE! THE GIRL. ALL OF THEM.
Y--YOU ARE TO R-R-R-REPORT IMMEDIATELY TO T-T-T-THE MINING COLONY OF DIRISHU-6!
DIRISHU?!
FWAP FWAP
WHAT THE HELL--?

MOTHER SAVES!
MOTHER IS LIFE!
FWOOOSH
TO THE CHURCH! *TO THE CHURCH!*

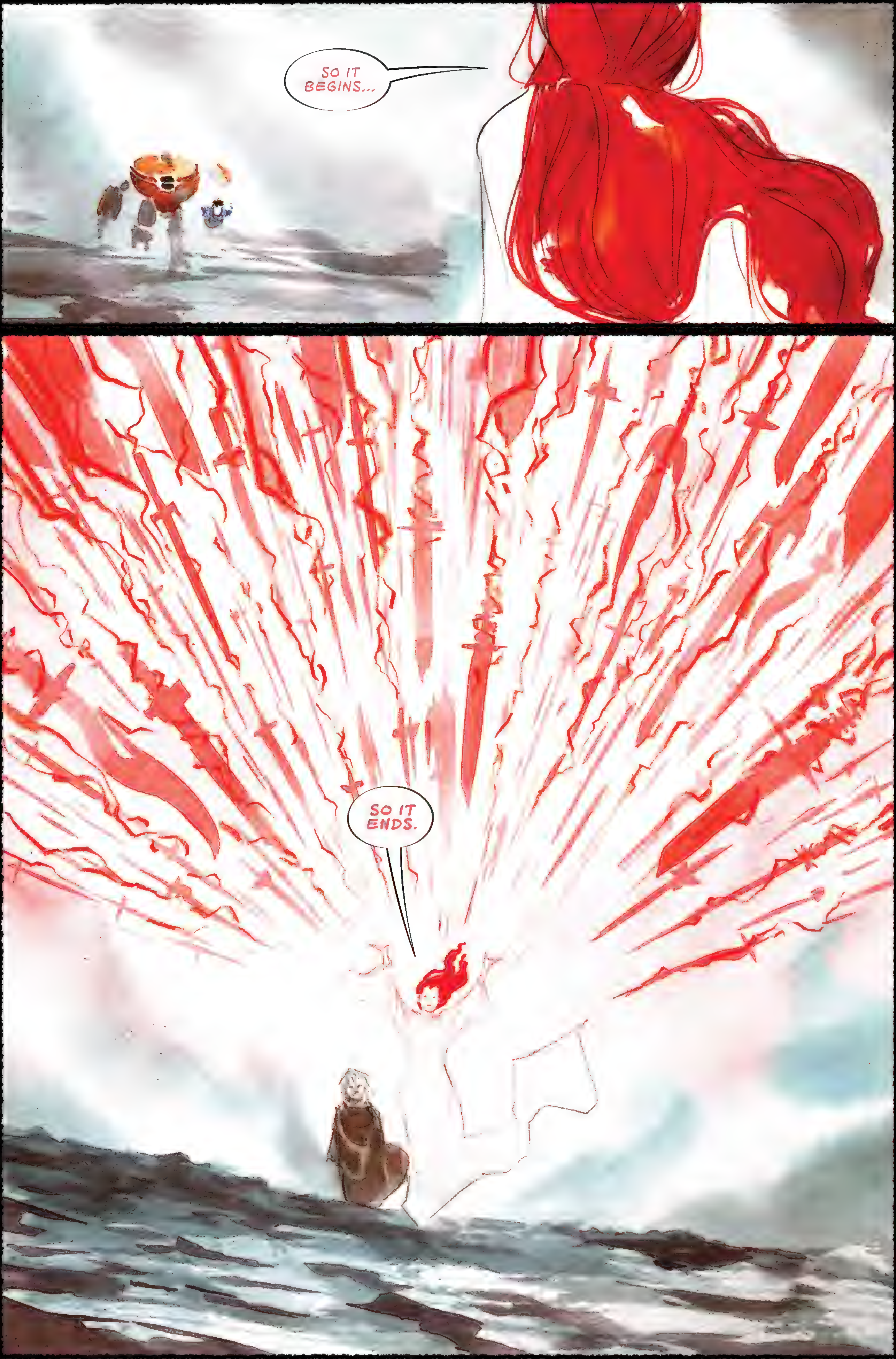

FWOOSH
NO!
HERE! LOAD THEM ABOARD! HURRY!
THEY'VE FOUND US NOW! THERE'S NOWHERE LEFT ON SAMPSON TO HIDE!
WE'RE *LEAVING* **SAMPSON.**
LEAVING SAMPSON?! BUT WHERE WILL WE GO?
WE'RE GOING **HOME.**

DIRISHU-6.
CHOOM CHOOOM
THOOM
THAT'S THE ROYAL GUARD! GNISH'S BEST SCRAPPERS!
WE CAN HOLD THEM OFF. THE IMPORTANT THING IS TO STOP THEM FROM REVEALING OUR LOCATION BEFORE WE'RE READY TO--
SKREEEEEE
MOTHER!

YOU HAVE TO GO! THE BARRACKS AREN'T SAFE. **GET TO THE MINES!**
I CAN FIGHT!
YEAH, I KNOW YOU CAN, KID. BUT NOT HERE.
FWASH
NOT **AGAINST** THAT.

COME WITH US, TIM! YOU CAN'T FACE HER ALONE.
NO. THIS IS WHY I'M HERE. THIS IS WHY I CAME BACK.
GO, TELSA. KEEP MILA SAFE!
BANDIT, WAIT UP!
FRA!
DRILLER! COME ON!
DRILLER, YOU SHOULD GO TOO.
DRILLER'S DONE ENOUGH RUNNING. DRILLER'S NOT LEAVING YOU AGAIN, LITTLE BOT.

THANK YOU.
ARE YOU READY THEN?
IS DRILLER *READY?*
DRILLER'S A KILLER... DRILLER'S A *REAL KILLER.*


SO IT BEGINS...
SO IT ENDS.

17

DIRISHU-6.
HEAD BACK, DRILLER. NOW, WHILE YOU STILL CAN.
DRILLER TOLD LITTLE BOT HE AIN'T LEAVING, SO DRILLER *AIN'T LEAVING.*
DRILLER HATES SPACE WITCHES. DRILLER *REALLY* HATES SPACE WITCHES.
IT'S BEEN SO LONG SINCE I'VE SEEN AN ACTUAL ROBOT. I ALMOST FORGOT HOW FUN IT IS TO DESTROY THEM.
HRRM...

DRILLER!
YOUR MAGIC IS POWERFUL, LITTLE MACHINE, BUT YOU ARE NOT MEANT TO WIELD MAGIC.
I WAS **BORN** IN BLOOD AND ARCANA. I WAS BORN **OF THE COVEN.**
AND YOU-- YOU WERE NOT BORN AT ALL, BUT **BUILT.**
AND ALL THAT IS BUILT CAN BE **DISMANTLED.**

SIRE!
THIS BETTER BE GOOD.
HMMM...
FETCH MY ARMOR AND MY FAVORITE LASER PIKE. WE'RE GOING **HUNTING.**

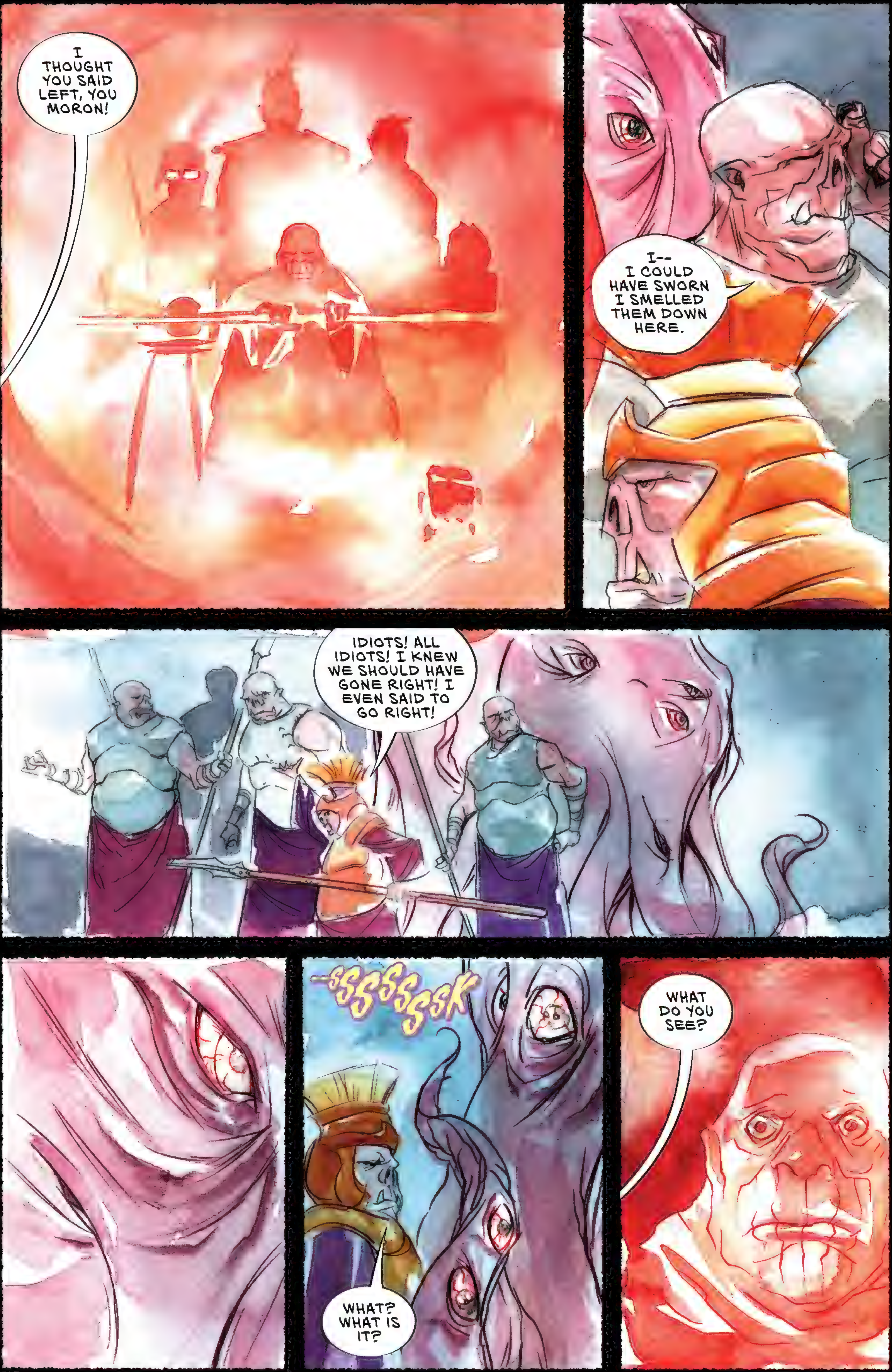
ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF THE SAMPSON SYSTEM.
YOU NEED TO **HOLD STILL,** KANTO.
STOP, FATHER. LET ME GO.
NONSENSE! YOUR FILTRATION SYSTEM JUST SPRANG A FEW HOLES. I CAN HAVE YOU FIXED GOOD AS NEW IF YOU'D JUST STOP SQUIRMING.
AND THEN WHAT? YOU EXPECT ME TO GO ON KNOWING MY WHOLE LIFE WAS A LIE? MY WIFE. MY CHILDREN. I'D RATHER **DIE** THAN LIVE KNOWING THEY WERE NEVER REAL.
WIPE MY MEMORY, FATHER! MAKE IT SO I FORGET EVERYTHING.
IF THAT'S WHAT YOU REALLY WANT, MY SON. I-- I CAN DO THAT.

KROOOM
WHAT THE HELL WAS THAT, EFF?
WE HAVE SOMETHING ON OUR TAIL! MUST HAVE PICKED US UP LEAVING ORBIT. PERIMETER DEFENSES...
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!
CYCLING UP THE SHIFTDRIVE!
WE'LL HAVE MOTHER'S **ENTIRE FLEET** ON US IF WE SHIFT!
AT THIS POINT IT DOESN'T REALLY MATTER, EFF! THEY'RE ALL HEADING TO DIRISHU ANYWAY! TO MILA!
"WE NEED TO FIND HER ***FIRST!***"

THE MINES OF DIRISHU-6.
MILA! WOULD YOU SLOW DOWN?!
FRA!
BANDIT SAYS THIS WAY!
FRA! FRA!
HOW THE HELL DOES BANDIT KNOW?!
MY SENSORS ARE PICKING SOMETHING UP. HEADED THIS WAY...
...SCRAPPERS!

HERE!
BANDIT! YOU SAID THIS WAY!
FRA!
IT'S A DEAD END!
...FRA?
EVERYONE STAY STILL! BE QUIET!
MIZERD?
I'LL CAST A **CLOAKING SPELL.** THEY'LL NEVER SEE US.

PSST-- WHICH WAY?
I BELIEVE THEY WENT LEFT, SIRE.
I BELIEVE THEY WENT LEFT!
YOUR HIGHNESS, MAYHAPS WE SHOULD CONSIDER PROCEEDING WITH A BIT MORE STEALTH?
TO ME, MY SCRAPPERS! WITH STEALTH!
WHAT?! IT'S A DEAD END!

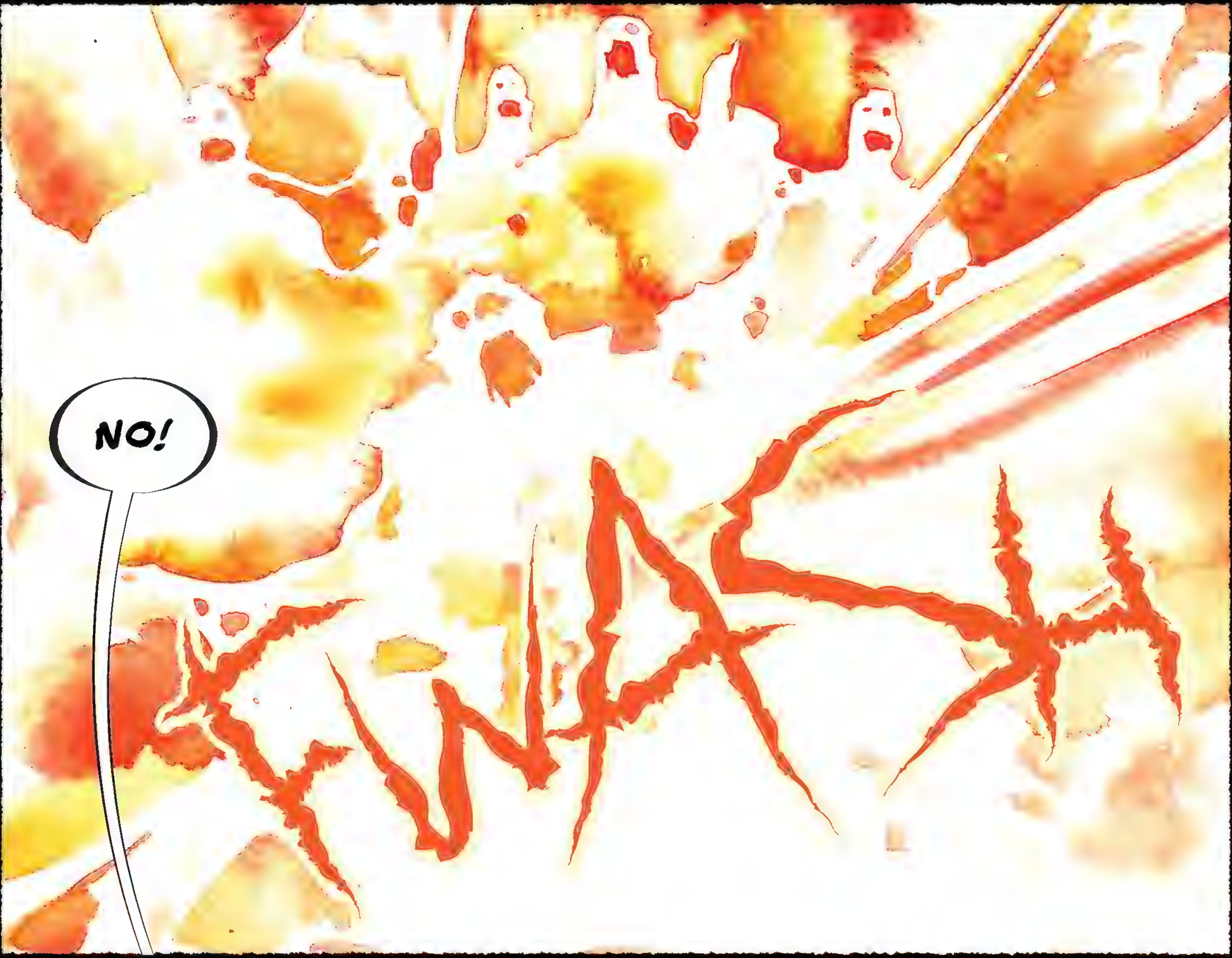

I THOUGHT YOU SAID LEFT, YOU MORON!
I-- I COULD HAVE SWORN I SMELLED THEM DOWN HERE.
IDIOTS! ALL IDIOTS! I KNEW WE SHOULD HAVE GONE RIGHT! I EVEN SAID TO GO RIGHT!
-SSSSSSSK
WHAT? WHAT IS IT?
WHAT DO YOU SEE?

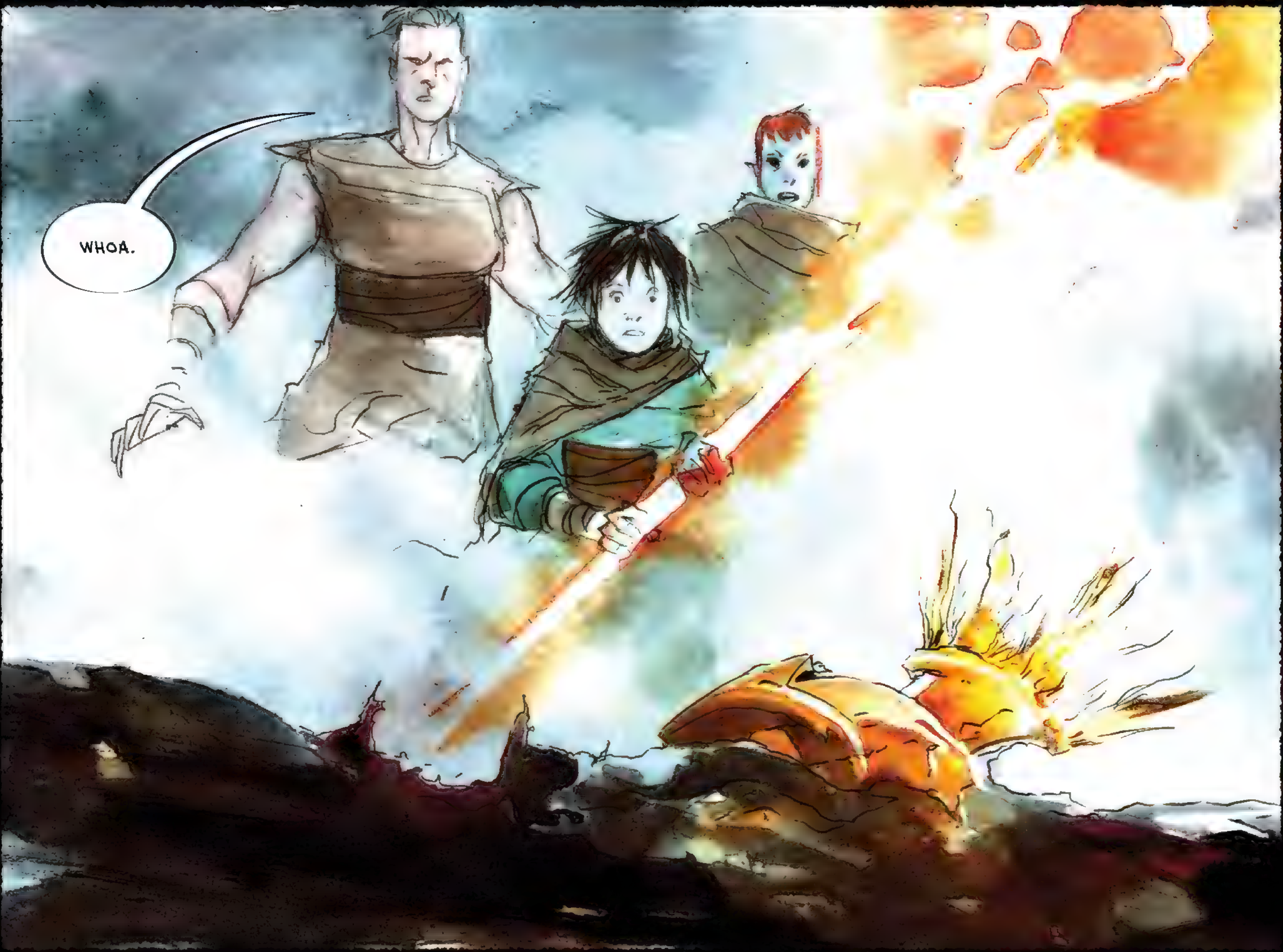
ARRHGHH!
SHAAAA
IT IS OVER, LITTLE MACHINE.
NO. YOU AND YOUR COVEN WERE NEVER SUPPOSED TO HAVE THIS MUCH POWER!
SHRACK
IT WAS MEANT TO BE SHARED!

YOU'RE A CHILD WITH **CHILDLIKE IDEAS.** GOOD AND EVIL. RIGHT AND WRONG. THESE THINGS DO NOT EXIST!
POWER IS TO BE **TAKEN!** THE WEAK DIE OFF!
"EVERYTHING FALLS."
THOOM
THOOOM
THOOM

THERE! HA! I TOLD YOU!
BEHIND ME!
AWAY! GET BACK!
FOOM
HOW DARE YOU ATTACK ME, OLD MAN!
I AM S'TOK, SON OF S'LOK!
CHOOOM

MIZERD!
MILA, NO!
FIRE!
NO!


NO!
FWASH


WHOA.

TSK...I EXPECTED MORE FROM THE GREAT **MAGE.**
NOW YOU'RE JUST A **BROKEN LITTLE TOY.**

YOUR HEAD WILL LOOK GOOD BY MY THRONE. WEAK THING, WOULD YOU LIKE THE HONORS?
THERE'S--ZZT--ONE--THING--ZZT...
OH? PLEASE TELL ME. BECAUSE YOUR FRIENDS HAVE ALL ABANDONED YOU, AND WHEN I'M DONE HERE, I'LL EVISCERATE THE LAST OF THE UGC.
WHEN I CAME BACK--ZZZT--**DIDN'T COME ALONE.**

RMMMBLLEE
WE MADE IT!
SSSKARRAKK
EFF, WHAT THE HELL IS THAT?!
WHAT-- WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?

GOODBYE, MOTHER.

CHOOM

I wasn't alive yet the first time the Descenders came.
My dad was only a little boy then. He must've been really scared.
But he didn't die. He grew up and met my mom. And they were together the **second** time the Descenders came.
That was when the universe **ended.** That was when all the machines went away.

And the **third time** the Descenders came...
Well, that was the **final** time. And I was there. I saw it all.
That was the day Tim-21 died.

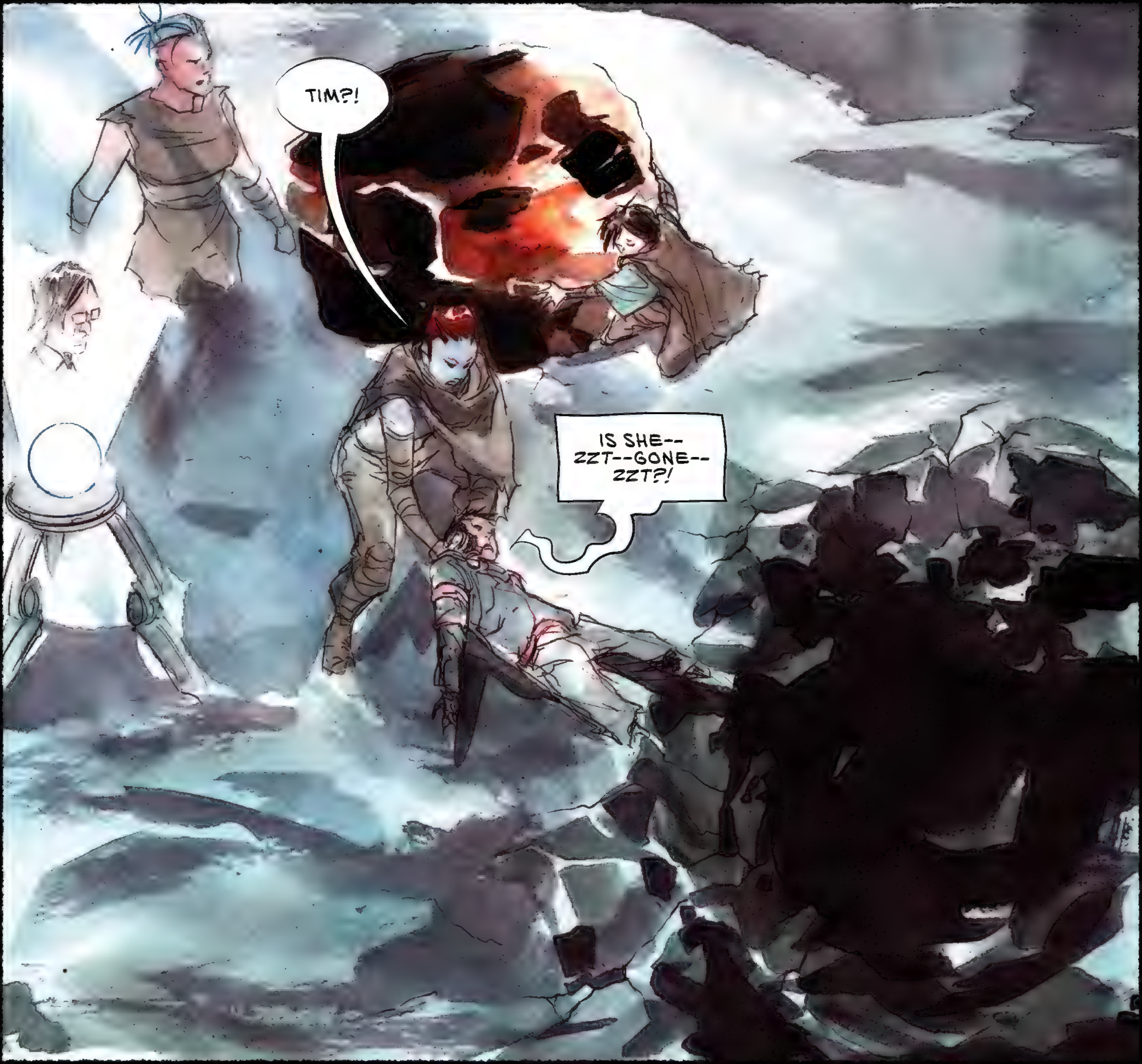
KKRRRZACK
AAAAGH!
LITTLE BOT! DRILLER'S COMING!
DRILLER?! KZZT--ARE YOU DOING--ZZT?!
DRILLER DOING WHAT HE DOES, LITTLE BOT. DRILLER DRILLING!

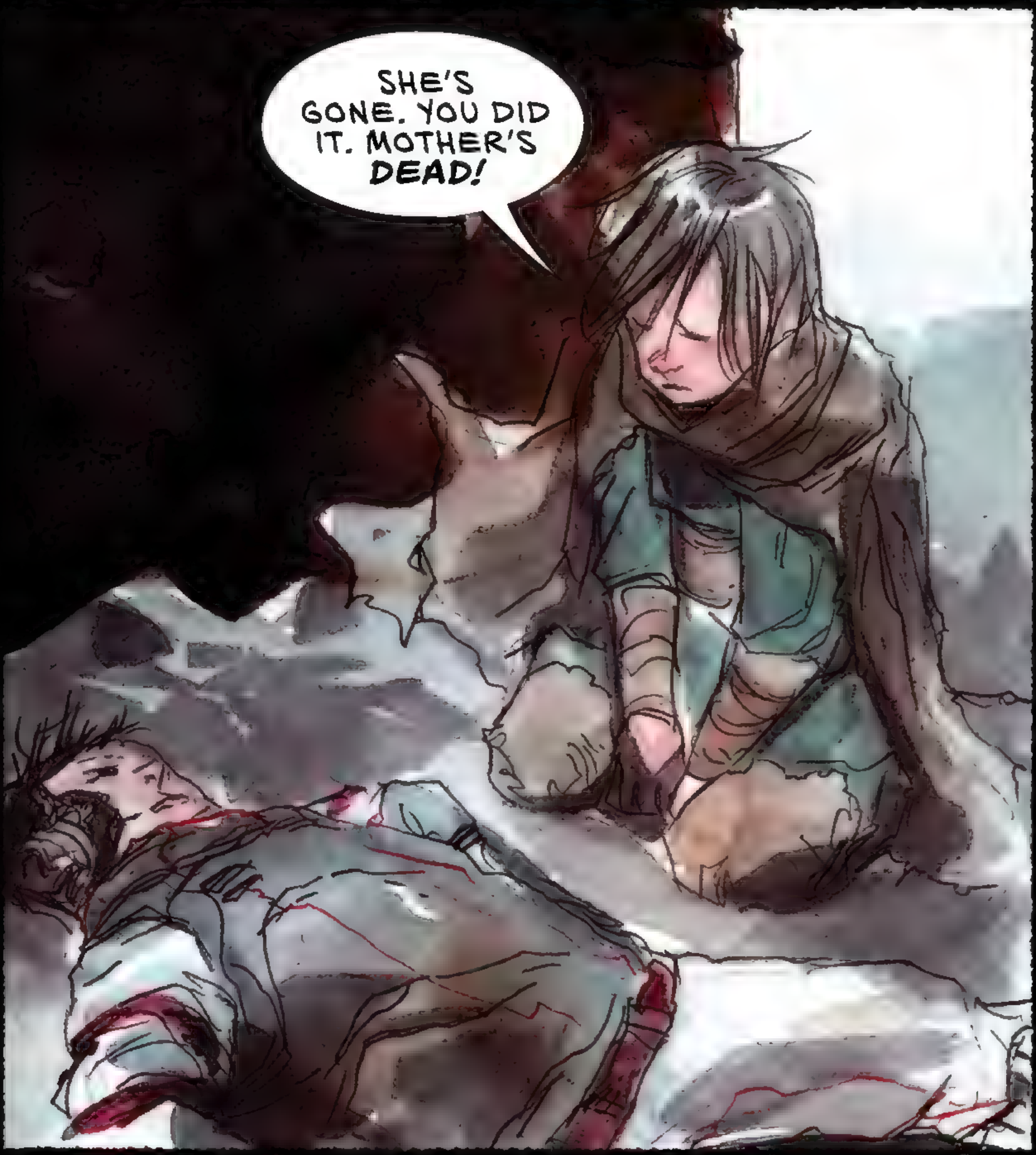
DRILLER! WAIT!
GOODBYE, LITTLE BOT.
DRILLER'S GOOD FOR ONE THING...
GIVE ME STRENGTH, MY COVEN-- STRENGTH!
YOU BETRAYED YOUR COVEN TIME AND TIME AGAIN, SISTER...
AND I TOLD YOU YOUR ARROGANCE WOULD BE THE DEATH OF YOU.

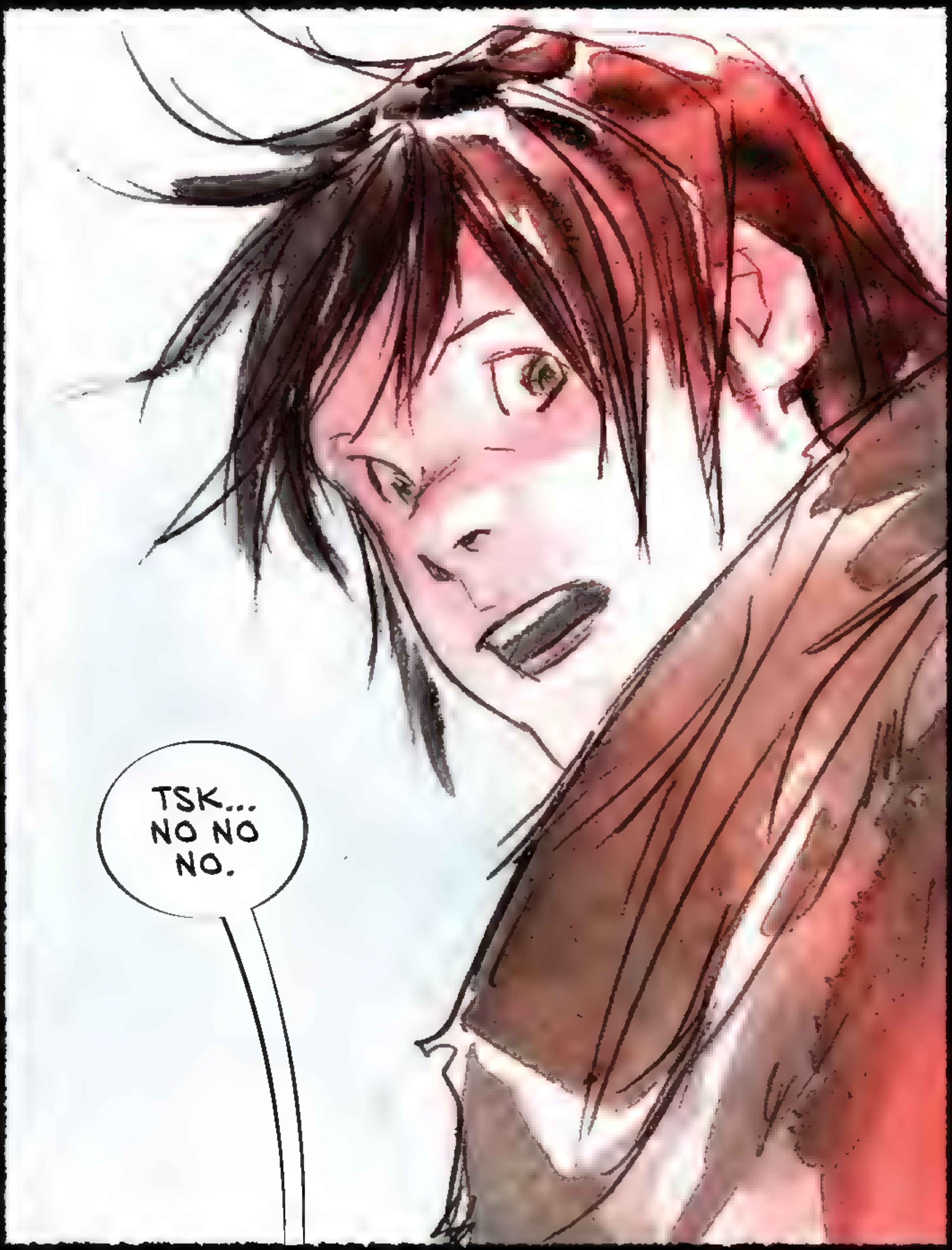
WEAK THING.
CHOOOM

NO!
TIM?!

HERE! HE'S HERE! HELP ME!
--UNGH! IT'S NO GOOD!
MOVE ASIDE... LET ME.
TIM-21?!


TIM?!
IS SHE--
ZZT--GONE--
ZZT?!

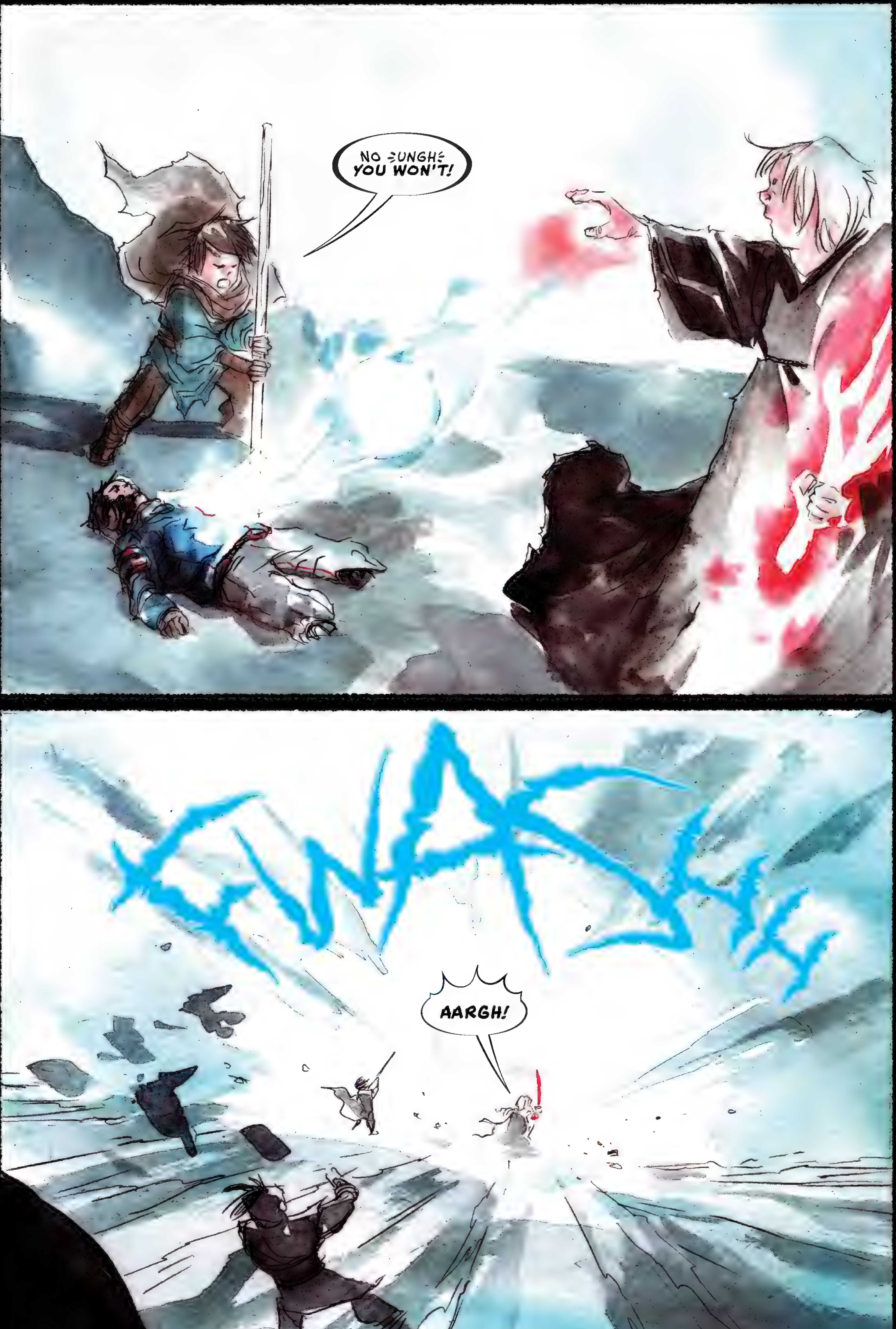

SHE'S GONE. YOU DID IT. MOTHER'S *DEAD!*

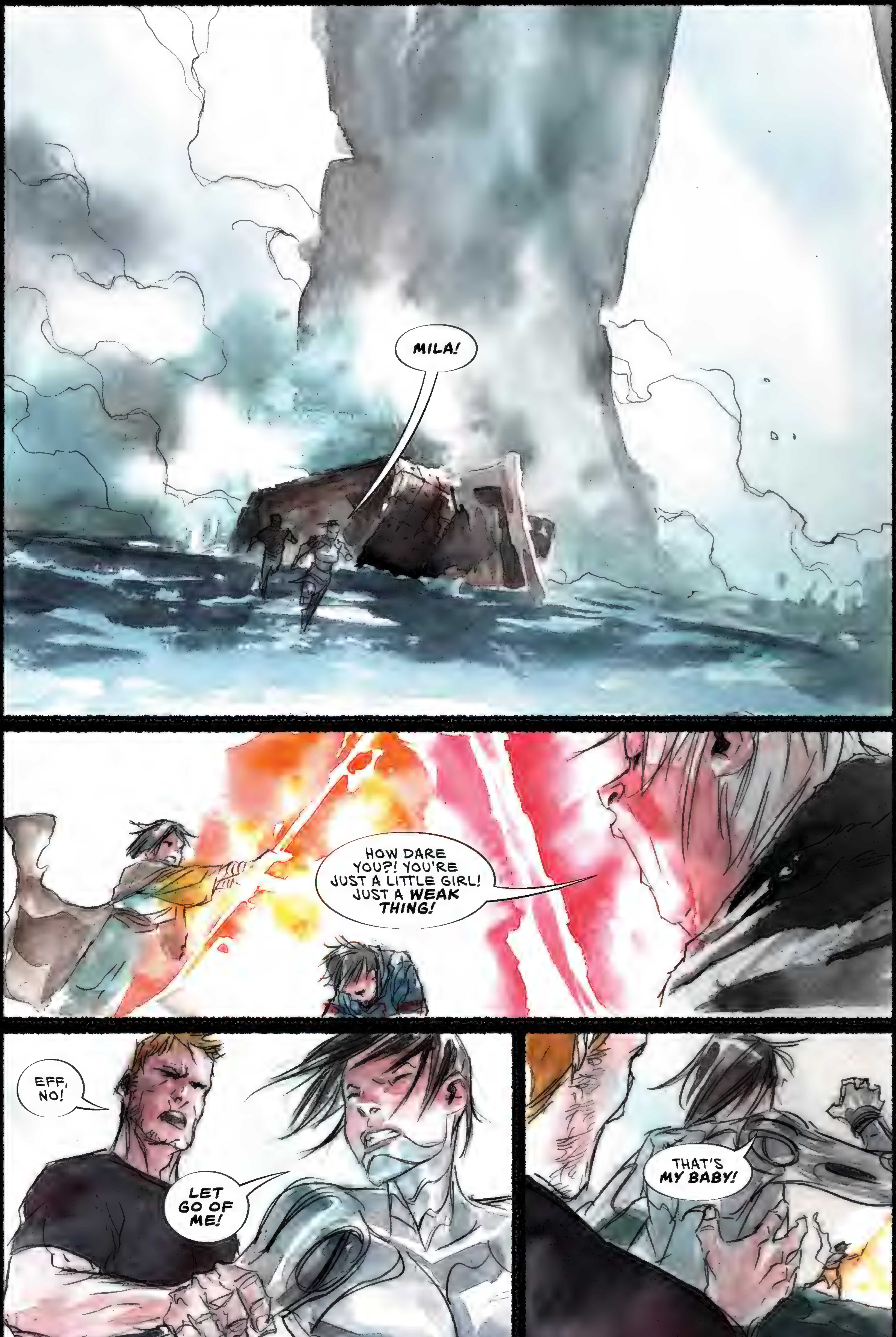

TSK... NO NO NO.

MOTHER SAVES... MOTHER IS ALL.

ANDY!
WHAT THE HELL IS GOING *ON* DOWN THERE?!
I HAVE *NO IDEA,* EFF.
MILA! IT'S HER... IT'S **REALLY** *HER.*

IT'S MINE AGAIN. THE COVEN. THE UNIVERSE. YOUR DESCENDER WON'T SAVE YOU THIS TIME.
GO! RUN! I'LL HOLD HER OFF!
CHOOM
TSK.
AND YOU... YOU'VE BEEN TO THE FORGE OF SPELLS...THE SOURCE. YOU'VE TAKEN FROM IT.
I'LL HAVE THAT, TOO.


NO =UNGH= YOU WON'T!
FWASH
AARGH!


MILA!
HOW DARE YOU?! YOU'RE JUST A LITTLE GIRL! JUST A **WEAK THING!**
EFF, NO!
LET GO OF ME!
THAT'S **MY BABY!**

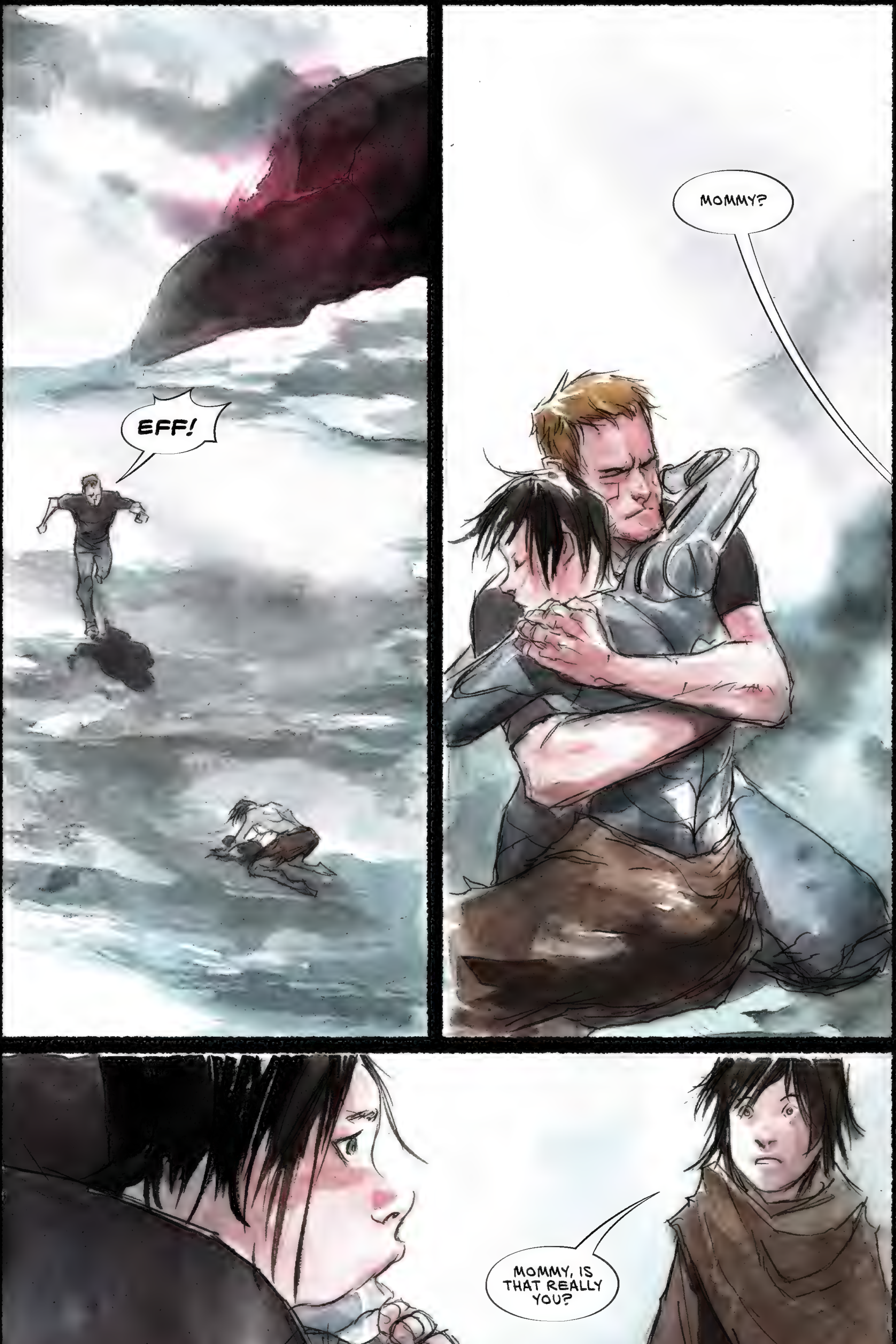
HNNGH!
KILL HER!
MINE... IT'S **MINE!**
TAKE IT!
NO, MOTHER... THE FORGE IS NOT MEANT FOR MAN. OR FOR MACHINE...
MILA! NO!
"...IT WAS ALWAYS MEANT **FOR BOTH...**"

MACHINE AND FLESH IN BALANCE...
IT WAS MEANT FOR SOMEONE... ***BETWEEN.***

YOU! YOU WERE MINE! YOU **ARE** MINE! MY VAMPIRE... MY CHILD!
YOU TOOK MY **LIFE** FROM ME, MOTHER...
YOU TOOK **EVERYTHING!**
NO! STOP IT! STOP!
GOODBYE, MOTHER.

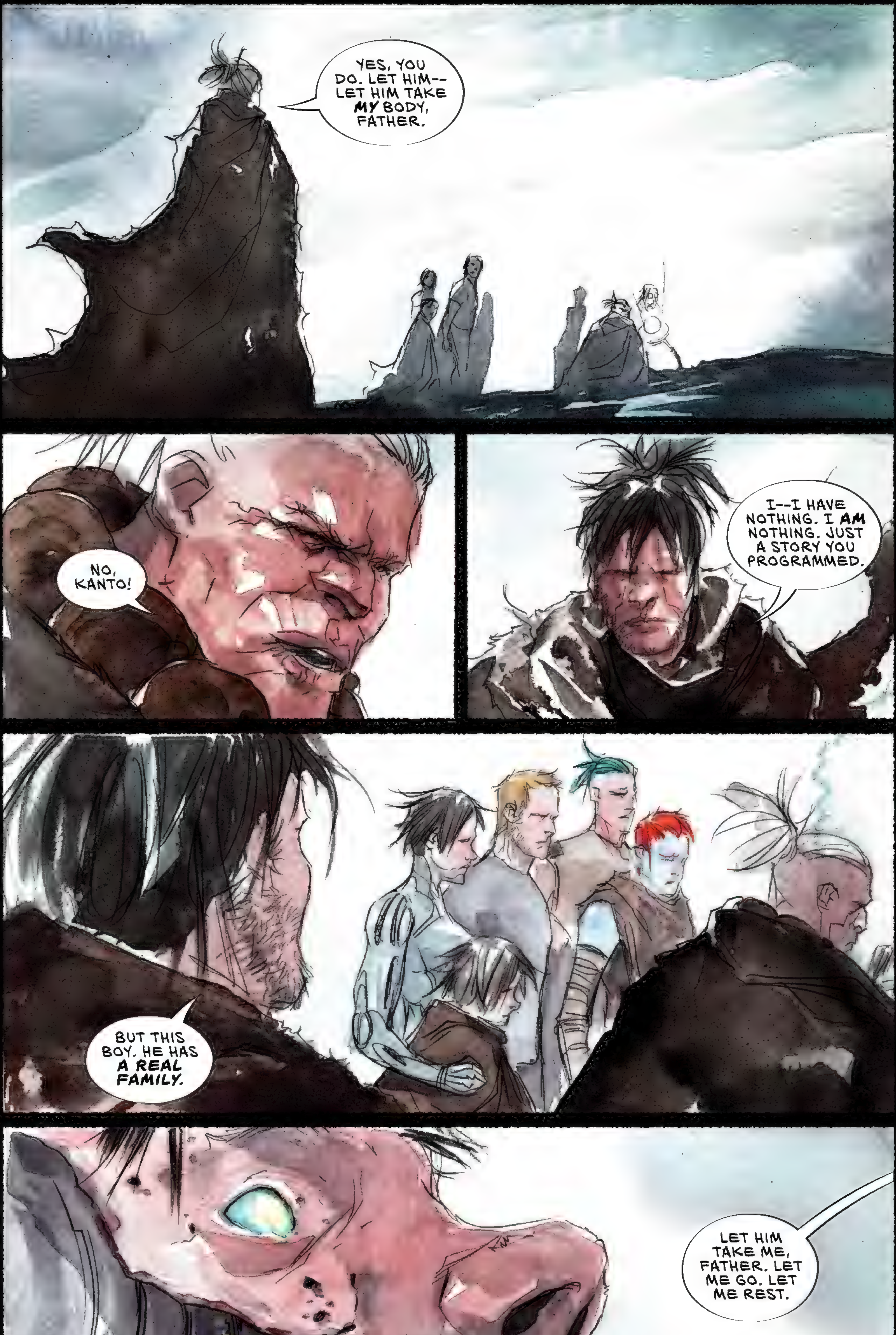
SHRAAAAAA

IT'S TOO MUCH--I DON'T--I DON'T WANT IT.
THEN GIVE IT BACK, QUEEN BETWEEN.
GIVE IT TO ALL OF THEM...
"...GIVE IT TO THE *GALAXY*."


EFF!
MOMMY?
MOMMY, IS THAT REALLY YOU?

IT'S ME, BABY. IT'S ME.

TIM?!
TIM, CAN YOU HEAR ME?!
TELSA, LET ME...
I CAN HELP.
HIS BODY IS DESTROYED...I-- I WOULDN'T EVEN KNOW WHERE TO START. AND WITHOUT MY TOOLS...
FRA!
WE'RE LOSING HIM! IF WE COULD DOWNLOAD HIS MEMORY, MAYBE-- BUT WE'VE NO COMPUTER.


YES, YOU DO. LET HIM-- LET HIM TAKE ***MY*** BODY, FATHER.
NO, KANTO!
I--I HAVE NOTHING. I **AM** NOTHING. JUST A STORY YOU PROGRAMMED.
BUT THIS BOY. HE HAS ***A REAL FAMILY.***
LET HIM TAKE ME, FATHER. LET ME GO. LET ME REST.

YOU'RE SURE?
I AM.
WE'RE RUNNING OUT OF TIME. HE'S FADING.
BEGINNING OVERRIDE--
NOW!
GARRGH-- 1010101010 101010 101!
KANTO?
TIM?

ANDY?
WE'RE THE SAME AGE AGAIN.

THE GNISHIANS ARE ON THE RUN, CAPTAIN.
THEY'LL ALL BE ON THE RUN NOW. ALL OF MOTHER'S FORCES.
YOU MEN ARE GOING TO HAVE YOUR WORK CUT OUT FOR YOU, ROUNDING THEM UP. BUT AT LEAST THERE'S A CHANCE.
WE SURE COULD USE A LEADER WITH EXPERIENCE COMMANDING A FLEET, CAPTAIN.
WHAT DO YOU THINK, HELDA?
WHAT DO I THINK? I THINK ONCE MY CAPTAIN, **ALWAYS** MY CAPTAIN.

NOW WHAT?
NOW WE STOP RUNNING. FIND SOMEWHERE TO CATCH OUR BREATH.
WHAT ABOUT HERE? I MEAN, THIS IS WHERE WE ALL GREW UP. AND TIM MADE IT SO WE CAN BREATHE WITHOUT HELMETS AND STUFF. AND BANDIT LIKES PLAYING IN THE MINES.
OH, I MEAN, IF I CAN KEEP HIM. I KNOW HE'S YOURS. SO IF YOU WANT HIM BACK...
HE'S **OURS**, MILA.
I GET FIRST PICK OF THE BEDROOMS!
FRA!

Yep. I was there the third time the Descenders came.
I was there when Tim-21 died and **Tim Tavers** was born.
I was there when Queen Between saved us all and Mother went away forever.
My mom and dad may have been there when the universe ended...

But I was there when it **started again.**
BANDIT, WAIT UP!
FRA!
FRA!
THE END

ASCENDER

EXTRAS

ASCENDER #11

The Digital Mage: Part 1 of 5

Jeff Lemire – December 30, 2019

PAGE 1.

1.
We open in flashback. We go back to the last issue of DESCENDER. The giant DESCENDER in space raises its arm and launches its final attack.

MIZERD CAPTION: I was there at *the end*. When the *big machines* came.

MIZERD CAPTION: I was there when they waved their hands and all the little machines *went away*.

2.
Close on MIZERD aboard the GNISHIAN SHIP. He grips his wooden staff, watching in awe and horror.

MIZERD CAPTION: Course I didn't know any of that then. I was just scared shitless like everyone else.

3.
Same he closes his eye and begins to teleport away in a swirl of magical energy that emanates from his staff.

MIZERD CAPTION: Didn't know what to do. So I used whatever magic I had in these old bones…and I got as far away from there as I could.

4.
We cut to DRILLER aboard Andy's ship. He teleports away in a swirl the same magical energy.

MIZERD CAPTION: And I took my *only friend* with me.

MIZERD CAPTION: Didn't realize it then, but me using magic to teleport *the big fella* away when I did, it must have somehow stopped him from going wherever the Descenders sent all the other bots.

PAGE 2.

1.
We cut to THE PLANET WOCH. The swamp planet where we first met Mizerd back in Descender. Driller and Mizerd both teleport into the swamp together in a swirl of magical energy.

MIZERD CAPTION: Don't think I really thought about where we were going, my old brain must've just sent us back to where I'd spent the last thirty years of my life. The planet Woch.

MIZERD CAPTION: It's where I'd first met the big fella, and it's where we needed up as the rest of the universe went ass over tea kettle.

2.
Mizerd lay in the swamp, very very weak, he looks up at Driller.

MIZERD CAPTION: Took almost everything I had to get us there. Don't know how long I slept after that.

3.
Driller sits sentry, watching over Mizerd as he sleeps.

MIZERD CAPTION: …But Driller never left my side.

4.
Mizerd and Driller trek across the swampy world together. Driller has a tarp and some camouflage over him.

MIZERD CAPTION: I knew things had changed. I could feel it. Something *old* had awakened. The magic I always practiced in secret…it was in the air now. No longer in hiding.

PAGE 3.

1.
Vampires attack them! Jumping down from trees.

MIZERD CAPTION: And either were the scappin' Vampires.

2.
Driller throws off the tarp and springs to action, defending them.

MIZERD CAPTION: Those blood-sucking bastards had spent eons underground, and when they finally came up…they were *hungry*.

MIZERD CAPTION: Having the big fella by my side was all that kept me alive.

PAGE 4.

1.
Now Driller and Mizerd, Driller camouflaged under his tarp again, are part of a large group of people and aliens being herded aboard a huge transport ship.

MIZERD CAPTION: Couldn't stay on Woch. Too small and not enough places to hide. And hide was what we'd do for the next ten years. Hide from vamps. Hide from Mother's black magic…and hide from the *tech hunters*.

MIZERD CAPTION: I used a cloaking spell to sneak us on one of the last relocation vessels before the Militia totally shut down what was left of the UGC.

2.
Now Driller and Mizerd trek across the ruins of SAMPSON.

MIZERD CAPTION: Don't know why I chose Sampson. Just had a feeling. Something in my gut telling me we needed to be there.

MIZERD CAPTION: And that's where we stayed.

3.
Driller and Mizerd alone in the wilderness of Sampson at night around a campfire.

MIZERD CAPTION: The one night, not three months ago I had a vision. Magic comes when you least expect it…

4.
A VISION APPEARS in the flames…We see TELSA'S DERELICT SHIP ON THE SMALL ISLAND where we left off last issue.

MIZERD CAPTION: And this time it showed me where we needed to go.

5.
Now we see Driller and Mizerd aboard a small boat. Driller uses his big drill arm like a motor to propel them across the water.

MIZERD CAPTION: Luckily Mother's Militia don't patrol the open waters much. If anything, being out there I felt safer and more alive than I had in years. I knew this was right…I knew this was what we had to do.

PAGE 5.

1.
Now we cut to THE PRESENT. Mizerd and Driller face Helda, Mila and Telsa on the island near the derelict spaceship.

Mila eyes Driller and Mizerd skeptically.

MIZERD: …And now I know why.

2.
Closer. Mizerd points at Mila. Mila looks up at the old man, skeptical.

MIZERD: We've been waiting for *you*.

MILA: Me?

MIZERD: Yeah, little 'un. *You*.

3.
Mizerd smiles. Tight on him.

MIZERD: You got magic in ya, kiddo. Big *big* magic.

4.
Mila frowns.

MILA: I'm *no witch!* I'm a star fighter just like Telsa and my Dad! I *even killed a Vampire once!*

5.
Bandit now comes running from the ship behind them, barking! They turn to see him.

MIZERD: If you say so.

BANDIT: FRA! FRA!

6.
Tight in Driller as he sees Bandit.

BANDIT (OP): FRA!

DRILLER: Yappy bot?

PAGE 6.

1.
Driller bends down and holds out his hands as Bandit runs to him.

DRILLER: Hrrrm…Driller never thought he'd see another robot again…Especially not little yappy bot.

BANDIT: FRA!

2.
Driller stands, holding and excited Bandit as Mila looks on.

BANDIT: FRA! FRA!

BANDIT: But Driller's happy. Hrrrm..Driller almost *missed* yappy bot.

3.
Telsa and Helda face Mizerd in front of the old ship. He leans on his staff.

TELSA: I hate to break it to you, Mizerd, but we are not *meant* to do anything here expect *leave*.

MIZERD: Wonderful. Where are we going?

PAGE 7.

1.
Telsa looks annoyed.

TELSA: *We,* as in Mila Helda and I, are going to get this rust pile working again and then we're getting off world.

TELSA: Bandit has a map. He's a bit scrapped up, but I know someone who can fix him.

2.
Mizerd and Telsa turn to see Mila, Bandit and Driller. Mila watches as Driller pets Bandit.

MIZERD: Well, I think you're gonna have a hard time getting the little bot to leave without Driller.

3.
Helda has opens a panel in the hull of the ship revealing a bunch of wires as Telsa and Mizerd look on.

HELDA: And I don't suppose you or the big bot can help *fix* this tub of trash, can you, wizard?

MIZERD: Sorry, never been too good with a wrench.

4.
Telsa looks around the island.

TELSA: What about that *ghost* that was in the ship? Any more of those around here?

5.
Tight on Mizerd. He smiles.

MIZERD: Ghosts?

MIZERD: These days, there's ghosts *everywhere*, Telsa.

PAGE 8.

1.
They all look up reacting to a noise off panel above.

BIRD (OP): SAW! SAW!

2.
Reverse. Low angle. A FLOCK OF BLACK BIRDS that just have one big eyeball where their heads should be fly over them, circling and KAWING madly.

BIRDS: SAW! SAW! SAW!

MIZERD: A flock of Blinkless!

3.
Telsa and Helda rush to the ship. Telsa barks at her. She barks back as she gets to work on the open panel in its hull.

TELSA: Militia won't be long now! We need to get this in the air, Helda!

HELDA: On it, Captain!

PAGE 9.

1.
Mila, Bandit and Driller look stand together watching the birds fly away.

BANDIT: FRA! FRA!

DRILLER: Hrrrm…Driller hates eyeball birds.

2.
Mila takes Driller's big hand. He looks down at her.

MILA: I hate them too! Now the trolls and vamps will come!

3.
Close on Driller.

DRILLER: Driller ain't scared of no Vamps. Driller's a real vamp killer.

4.
She reaches up and takes his big hand and smiles.

5.
He looks down at her.

DRILLER: Hrmm…

PAGE 10.

1.
We now cut to MOTHER'S CASTLE on MATA. Maybe a nice establishing shot of the castle and the poisoned sea.

CAPTION: MATA.

2.
We cut inside the castle, which had been attacked by THE UGC REBELS, so there is rubble and ruins. MOTHER and SISTER appear in a swirl of magic. Mother is on her hands and knees. Sister stands tall, triumphant.

MOTHER: What do you want, Sister? What do you hope to accomplish with this treachery?

SISTER: Treachery? Tsk. If anyone know treachery, you murderous bitch…

3.
Close on Sister.

SISTER: I will rule. It is that simple. Your reign *is over.* I am Mother of The Galaxy now. And when we find the source of magic, my reign will be *eternal.*

4.
Mother looks up at her, defiant.

MOTHER: Power comes in many forms, Sister. You may have more magic than me, but my armies are *loyal.* They will never follow *you.*

5.
Sister puts her finger under Mother's chin and raises her head so that they look at each other.

SISTER: Which is exactly why I am going to keep you around, *weak thing.*

PAGE 11.

1.
Mother lashes out, lunging at Sister, magic glowing from her hands.

MOTHER: No! I won't let you treat me like this! I swore, never again!

2.
Mother, furious, casts a spell and fires a cloud of ice daggers at Sister.

MOTHER: Never again!

3.
Sister casts her own spell and the ice dagger transforms to insects before they reach her.

SISTER: You *will* do exactly what I say.

4.
Now the insects surge at Mother, swarming her. She flails around.

MOTHER: --Ungh!!

5.
Mother waves most of the insects away and reaches out one hand at Sister, casting another spell and creating a big GHOST-LIKE skeletal hand in the air that mimics her own hand. It reaches for Sister.

MOTHER: I fought! I fought and bled for all that I have! It always just came to you. I had to earn it and you *will not take it, Sister!*

PAGE 12.

1.
The big ghost hand tries to grab Sister, but she just smiles and holds out her own hands, breaking its bone-fingers off.

SISTER: I've already taken it, you fool. The magic of *all of our Mothers is mine.* You are now a minor conjurer at best…

2.
Sister casts a spell. Mother is surrounded by glowing magic.

SISTER: And at worst…

3.
Mother transforms into her CHILDHOOD SELF. She looks down at her own hands, shocked and mortified.

SISTER (OP): A weak little thing again.

MOTHER: *No!*

4.
Sister creates a leash of magical energy around Little Mother's neck, pulling her along like a dog.

SISTER: Now come, weak thing. We have much work to do.

MOTHER: Where…where are we going?

5.
Sister stops in front of a LIVING SPACESHIP that waits for them outside of the castle ruins.

SISTER: Where else? We are going *home.*

PAGE 13.

1.
We now see a number of MILITIA VESSELS skimming across the water at high speed. Trolls and Vamps on deck.

MILA (OP): They're coming!

2.
We are now on the island with the gang. Mizerd has created a little magical window in mid-air with his staff. Inside of it we see the image from PANEL 1.

Mila Bandit, Driller and Mizerd are there. Mila turns, yelling to Telsa off panel.

MILA: Telsa! *They're coming!*

BANDIT: Fra!

3.
Helda and Telsa are hard at work on the ship. Some sparks fly as Helda works on its guts.

SFX: ZZKT!

TELSA: I heard you the first time!

TELSA: How we looking, Helda?

HELDA: She may get off the ground, but after that…

4.
Telsa ushers them all into the ship, up the ramp as Helda closes the hatch on the outside.

TELSA: Good enough! Get in everyone, let's go, hurry!

DRILLER: Hrrm…Driller don't hurry. Driller is Driller.

HELDA: Driller is going overboard he doesn't shut up and move!

5.
Driller and Helda face off inside the ship. Helda scowls at him.

DRILLER: Hrmm…

HELDA: Don't you "hrrrm" me! I'll have you for spare parts, you big scrap pile!

PAGE 14.

1.
They turn to see THE MILITIA SKIMMERS coming at them across the island! Vamps leap from it.

VAMPS: Hssss!!

TROLL: Mother saves! Mother sees all!

HELDA: Shit!

2.
Driller leaps down out of the ship. Mila screams to him.

MILA: *Driller?!*

DRILLER: Hrrm…Get going. Driller'll do some killin'

3.
Telsa runs to the cockpit area, Mila, Helda, Mizerd and Bandit follow.

TELSA: Helda, fire the engines!

MILA: We can't leave him!

4.
Telsa turns and snaps at Mila.

TELSA: I promised you Dad I'd get you off this rock! I can't risk that just because you found a new pet! Now strap in!

5.
Mizerd puts his hand on Mila's shoulder as she pouts.

MIZERD: Don't worry about Driller, Young'un…

PAGE 15.

1.
Driller kills some vamps with lethal force.

MIZERD CAPTION: It's those Vamps you should pray for.

DRILLER: Hrmm…Come on then, you blood drinking bags of meat!

2.
Now a BIG CAVE TROLL, a bit larger than Driller, with a big spiked club, leaps down from the Skimmer, facing off with him.

TROLL: ROOOAAARR!!!

DRILLER: Hrrm…

3.
Driller roars back at it.

DRILLER: ROOOOAAARRR!!!

PAGE 16.

1.
Telsa and Helda at the controls in the cockpit, rushing to get ready to take off.

HELDA: Engine one id only at half power, but two is primed.

TELSA: Okay, lets punch it!

2.
Mila yells at Telsa. Furious.

MILA: I told you we can't leave him!

3.
Telsa yells back.

TELSA: And I told you to strap in and shut up, you little brat!

4.
We cut outside the ship. The engines at the back of the ship fire up, heat and flame shooting out.

Nearby Driller is locked in combat with the big troll. Driller has met his match. The big troll swings his club down on Driller, Driller blocks with his drill arm.

SFX: FWOOOM!

DRILLER: Hrrrm…Driller hates Cave Trolls.

5.
Driller flips the Troll over and throws him into the flame of the engine. The troll burns up in. the flame and heat.

TROLL: --RAAAAARRGHH!!!

PAGE 17.

1.
The ship is lifting off now. Driller runs after it. The Vamps and Militia chase him.

MILITIA: Mother forbids this! Mother forbids it!

2.
Driller leaps, reaching for the landing gear under the ship as spears fly by him.

3.
The ship lifts off, Driller dangles from the landing gear. A VAMP leaps and grabs onto his leg.

VAMP: HSSSS!!

DRILLER: Hrmm…

4.
Driller drills the Vamp's face with his big drill. Blood flies.

DRILLER: Driller drill your fangy face, Vamp! Get off a' Driller!

PAGE 18.

1.
Mila and Mizerd sit strapped into chairs in the cockpit. Mizerd sits beside her. Bandit leaps down from Mila's lap.

MILA: Bandit!

BANDIT: FRA! FRA!

2.
Mila unstraps and runs after Bandit towards the back of the ship.

TELSA: Mila!

3.
Mila and Bandit run into the back cargo hold of the ship as DRILLER climbs up through the works of the landing gear. He still has a VAMP latches onto him. The vamps face is a ruins mess where it was drilled, just a bloody hole, but it's still alive.

BANDIT: FRA!

DRILLER: Hrrm…Careful little human! Driller's got a stubborn Vamp Driller can't shake. Get back!

PAGE 19.

1.
Mila, defiant grabs a metal pole from a pile of tools nearby.

MILA: Everyone needs to stop *telling me what to do!*

2.
Mila lunges the sharp end of the pole through the Vamp's heart, killing it.

DRILLER: Hrrm…

VAMP: --Grrk!

3.
Driller looks down at her.

DRILLER: Little girl's a killer. Little girl's a *real* killer.

4.
She looks pack up at him and smiles.

MILA: Told you.

PAGE 20-21

DOUBLE SPREAD.

1.
Mila, Bandit and Driller walk back into the cockpit.

> **TELSA:** Everything all right back there.

> **MILA:** Ship is clear. And I saved Driller. Guess I'll just *shut up* and *strap in* now, Captain.

2.
Helda looks at Telsa from the co-pilot's chair, smiling.

> **TELSA:** Don't look at me like that.

> **HELDA:** Whatever you say, Captain.

3.
Through the cockpit window we see space. Helda points ahead.

> **HELDA:** Look there, Mila. We're clearing the atmosphere.

4.
Mila stands between them, looking out at the stars. Awe fills her face. Eyes wide. Helda smiles.

> **MILA:** I've never been in space before. Never even been off world before.

> **HELDA:** I told you, little one…

5.
They fly out into space, away from the planet Sampson behind them.

> **HELDA CAPTION:** First the sea, then the stars.

PAGE 22.

1.
We cut to KING S'TOK the Gnishina boy-king. He sits cross-legged in his royal quarters aboard his royal ship eating a bunch of snacks and playing video games, like the little fucking piggie that he is.

> **CAPTION:** The Royal Vessel of Gnish. Somewhere in Space.

2.
The door to S'tok's quarters slide open and a GNISHIAN in uniform stands addressing him. S'tok keeps playing his video game.

> **GNISHIAN:** Your highness, we've detected an illegal deep space craft taking off from Sampson. Looks like a pre-war class cruiser.

> **S'TOK:** So?! What do I care? Let the old witch handle it. I've almost cleared the next level, and later on J'Lot and I are going to record my debut album in the ship's new recording studio.

3.
Close on the Gnishian. He raises an eyebrow.

> **GNISHIAN:** >Ahem< Yes, and I do look forward to listening to that, your highness, But it is Gnish's sworn duty to investigate any illegal tech and confiscate.

4.
We pull back now to see the BIG SQUID FILLED WITH EYEBALLS floating there beside S'tok.

> **GNISHIAN:** And need I remind you that Mother is *watching* us *very* closely.

> **S'TOK:** >Sigh< Fine. Set a course to intercept the illegals and prepare all weapons.

5.
Close on smiling S'tok.

> **S'TOK:** I haven't *slaughtered* anyone in ages.

CONTINUED!

ASCENDER 12
The Digital Mage: Part 2 of 5
Jeff Lemire – January 1, 2020

Dustin, this is the sequence you came up with for Effie's resurrection. We start with the close up inside of her veins/ heart, restarting itself, purging out the vampire blood/ cleansing it- like one of those intro title scene opening credits in movies and cuts outside, close up of her face as she gasps for air- and she's alive again!

But I want to put a twist on that in intercut these panels inside of Effie, with panels of Andy preparing to bury her in the woods.

If the panels inside Effie are not what you had in mind, please feel free to adapt these pages the way you visualized them.

1.
We open on a wide, cinematic shot. Andy leads his horse through the dark woods at night. Effie is draped over the back of the horse.

> **ANDY CAPTION:** I am nineteen years old and I see you for the first time at the robot rights rally on Ostrakon. Full of anger, and self-righteousness. *Full of life.*

2.
Blackness. Deep inside Effie's veins and arteries.

3.
Andy is now in the woods in a small clearing. Still night. He used a rock to dig in the ground. Effie lay nearby on her back.

> **ANDY CAPTION:** I'm twenty-two and The Descenders have taken Tim away and we are left with one other once again. But deep down we know that's all we need. Each other.

4.
Inside of Effie. Inside some of her veins that are laced with circuits.

PAGE 2.

1.
Andy digs. The whole is getting bigger. His hands bleeding.

> **ANDY CAPTION:** I'm twenty-four and I'm proven wrong because our daughter is born and now I know all we ever really needed was her.

2.
Inside her veins that lead to her heart.

3.
Andy carry's Effie towards the grave.

> **ANDY CAPTION:** I'm twenty-six and you and I hold hand as we walk across Dirishu with Mila on your back and I hear her say "Mommy" for the first time in my helmet comm. You hear it too and you squeeze my hand.

4.
Effie's robot heart.

PAGE 3.

1.
Effie lay in the grave now. Andy kneels looking down at her, touching her face on last time.

> **ANDY CAPTION:** I'm twenty-seven and the monsters drag you away from us and I think I'll never see you again.

2.
Her heart.

3.
Andy begins to throw dirt on Effie, burying her.

> **ANDY CAPTION:** I'm thirty-two and I find you again. And then you die in my arms.

4.
Her heart.

PAGE 4.

1.
Andy sit by the shallow grave. A mound of dirt. Effie is buried.

> **ANDY CAPTION:** And now *you're gone.* Mila's gone. And I have *nothing.*

2.
Her heart restarts!

3.
Same as Panel 1.

4.
Her heart is pumping!

5.
Same as 1, except Effie's hand comes reaching out of the grave! Andy looks on with shock!

PAGE 5.

1.
Andy desperately pulls Effie out of the grave! She pulls herself out up to her waits and grasps for him!

> **ANDY:** Eff!?

> EFFIE: Andy!?

2.
Effie touches her chest.

> **EFFIE:** My mech system—*my between parts*—they were always set on stand-by. A failsafe in case my heart gave out. I think my heart was all that was keeping the Vamp virus going.

3.
She turns to him; relief fills her face.

> **EFFIE:** Once it died, and my cybernetic parts took over… they must have *purged it!*

4.
They kneel facing each other.

> **ANDY:** What do you remember?

> **EFFIE:** Nothing. Nothing and *everything.*

5.
She looks devastated.

> **EFFIE:** I remember you. I remember Mila. Dirishu. Then the vamps came. And then it was dark, Dark *forever.*

6.
She smiles at him.

> **EFFIE:** But now *here you are.*

> **ANDY:** Here I am.

PAGE 6.

SPLASH.

They kiss. SILENT.

PAGE 7.

1.
She pulls away and turns, alarmed.

> **ANDY:** Eff? What is it?

> **EFFIE:** Sensors are picking up movement*…lots of it.* Moving but not warm blooded.

2.
They stand together looking into the woods.

> **EFFIE:** Vamps! Do you have any weapons?

> **ANDY:** Nothing.

3.
She grabs his and they run.

> **EFFIE:** There's no fighting them then. We gotta move!

PAGE 8.

1.
BIG PANEL.
We now cut to THE VAMP MILITIA moving through the woods. There is a large iron and wood TANK-LIKE vehicle on spiked treads with a cow catcher on the front and vamp flags on it. It rolls though the forest, knocking over trees and billowing black smoke out of little smokestacks on its back.

There is a little cockpit and windshield on its top section. Little winged trolls fly overhead carrying banners. VAMP SOLDIERS march along either side of it.

> **TROLL:** Mother saves! Mother loves you!

2.
We cut inside the small cockpit. VIX pilots the ship.

> **RADIO:** General Vix—our scouts have picked up their scent ahead!

> **VIX:** Excellent! Keep pressing forward and send a small party to flank them and cut them off.

> **RADIO:** Yes, General.

3.
Vix hits some controls.

> **VIX:** Oracle prime, link me through with the moon of Amun.

> **RADIO:** Yes, General. Establishing link--

PAGE 9.

1.
On a small screen in the cockpit, the THROBIN/FROBIN merged duo appear.

> **THROBIN:** G-g-g-general V-vix! What do w-w-w-we owe this honor?

> **GENERAL:** Have you heard from Mother? Is she there?

2.
Closer on Throbin/Frobin onscreen.

> **FROBIN:** Mother? Why *no,* General, Neither Throbin nor I have heard from Mother in a few cycles. It's not like you to lose track of her. Don't tell me you've finally fallen from Mother's graces and her *bed?*

3.
Vix smashes the screen with his fist in a tantrum.

> **VIX:** Fools!

4.
Vix is pissed. He is seething.

VIX: . . .

VIX: Where *are* you, Mother.

PAGE 10.

1.
We cut back to ANDY and EFFIE running in the woods.

EFFIE: This way!

2.
Andy stops, catching his breath, leaning against a tree.

ANDY: Hold up! There's something I need to tell you. Mil. She's—

3.
Effie turns to him, panicked.

EFFIE: Is she hurt?!

4.
He holds up a hand to explain.

ANDY: No…no. But she's with Telsa.

5.
Effie screw up her face.

EFFIE: Telsa?!

ANDY: I know. Long story.

6.
Effie is a bit annoyed now.

EFFIE: Well, where are they? I *need* to see her, Andy.

PAGE 11.

1.
Andy begins to walk she follows.

ANDY: Last time I saw them they were going out to sea.

EFFIE: What?! You don't even know *where she is?!*

2.
He turns back, annoyed.

ANDY: Hey! Cut me some slack here, Eff! I've been dealing with a *few things!*

3.
She grabs his arm, stopping him. Her other hand touches her temple near her robot eye.

ANDY: What? What is it?

EFFIE: Four of them. ahead!

4.
She turns, looking behind them.

EFFIE: And the rest closing in fast behind.

5.
She goes to a tree and breaks off a branch.

ANDY: What are you doing?

6.
She holds up the broken branch, it has a sharp jagged end.

EFFIE: Wooden stakes.

PAGE 12.

1.
Andy starts breaking off a branch.

ANDY: Gather as many as you can!

2.
Effie turns, a VAMP leaps out of the trees towards them.

VAMP: HSSSSS!!!

EFFIE: Too late!

3.
One lands on Effie, mouth open, teeth slobbering.

VAMP: Traitor!

EFFIE: Ungh!

4.
Andy stabs it in the back with a jagged branch.

VAMP: Hsssss!!

5.
Andy kicks the vamp in the stomach, it rolls off of Effie.

ANDY: Get up, Eff!

PAGE 13.

1.
High angle. SIX MORE VAMPS come out of the trees, surrounding them now.

ANDY: Shit. Stay close.

EFFIE: Always.

VAMPS: HSSSS!

2.
Closer on Andy and Effie, back to back. Getting ready to fight.

EFFIE: Can't run anymore. This is it. We have to fight.

3.
Suddenly, a wooden stake comes flying from off panel and stabs a Vamp in the chest!

SFX: SHLUNK!

VOICE (OP): Away, abominations!

PAGES 14-15.

1.
BIG PANEL.
KANTO THE BLOOD SCRAPPER comes leaping down from a tree and attacks, using a crossbow that fires wooden stakes!

KANTO: These woods belong to KANTO!

2.
He tosses Effie a short sword.

KANTO: M'Lady!

EFFIE: Thanks!

3.
Effie beheads a vamp!

EFFIE: --Gah!

PAGE 16.

1.
KANTO stabs another through the chest.

KANTO: *Back to hell,* fiend!

2.
They stand together, dead vamps all around.

KANTO: Do you require safe passage, friends?

ANDY: Yeah. That would be good.

3.
He bows to them.

> **KANTO:** It would be KANTO'S pleasure to assist you. Any enemy of *the beasts* is a friend of these woods.

4.
Effie looks back.

> **EFFIE:** There are more coming. *A lot* more.

5.
KANTO removes his mask. He smiles.

> **KANTO:** That is good. KANTO'S blades are *thirsty.*

PAGE 17.

1.
We cut to the snowy planet that we saw in MOTHER'S FLASHBACK issue. The living spaceship comes flying down over the snowy landscape.

> **SFX:** SCREEEEEEE!

2.
The ship has landed outside the SMALL CABIN where Mother grew up. Sister and Mother (as a little girl) descend from the ship.

> **SISTER:** Come, weak thing. Back to where we began.

3.
The open the old cabin door and enter.

> **MOTHER:** I don't like this place.

> **SISTER:** Tsk. You're acting like a child.

4.
Sister looks at the old empty cauldron in the center of the room.

> **SISTER:** This is where you always belonged, little sister. Scrubbing floors. Cleaning. If you'd just stayed *in your place,* none of this would hurt so much.

5.
Little Mother looks around.

> **MOTHER:** Why are we here? Here of all places?

6.
Sister kicks over the old cauldron.

> **SISTER:** *This* is not why we came here. I just wanted to remind you of how small you really are.

PAGE 18.

1.
They walk from the Cabin into the snow. The cabin burns behind them.

> **SISTER:** This way. Hurry, weak thing.

2.
They are in the old UGC fortress where the Magical Seedbank is located. A few dead UGC officers in uniform lay around. They are just skeletons now.

3.
They enter the SEEDBANK. It is now mostly empty expect for a few scattered relics.

> **MOTHER:** All the great beasts were released long ago. The most powerful relic stored in my castle, their power absorbed or used up.

> **SISTER:** Yes, but this place itself…it has power. Power that can never be removed.

4.
Sister draws a large circle in the dust on the floor.

> **SISTER:** The UGC lived here. Surrounding this place for decades. It connects *us* to *them.*

5.
She holds out her hand to little Mother.

> **SISTER:** Give me your hand.

PAGE 19.

1.
Sister cuts Mother's palm with her fingernail, drawing blood. Mother winces.

> **MOTHER:** Ouch!

> **SISTER:** Quiet, baby.

2.
She holds her hand out and a drop of blood falls into the circle.

> **SISTER:** The UGC rebels…a mage protects them. Someone who's power challenges ours. But how did this mystery mage *get* that power? It was not from us. Not from the relics stored here.

3.
The circle begins to glow with magical energy. They look down into it.

> **MOTHER:** *The source!*

> **SISTER:** Yes! The enemy must have found that which we seek…*the source of magic.*

4.
Now a silhouetted figure appears in the magical energy.

> **SISTER:** We find the mage we eliminate the rebels and find the source.

> **SISTER:** But before we find him…we need to know who he is…we need to *see his face.*

5.
Low angle they look down at the circle, it lights their faces.

> **SISTER:** There look—his face emerges!

6.
Close on Mother. Surprise fills her face.

> **MOTHER:** But--it's *not a man* at all…

PAGE 20.

1.
BIG PANEL.
High angle. We reverse and now see TIM-21 appear in the magical circle.

> **SISTER:** --It's just a boy!

2.
Close on Sister. She smiles.

> **SISTER:** That's no boy.

CONTINUED!

ASCENDER

JEFF LEMIRE

is the creator of the acclaimed graphic novels *Sweet Tooth* (at Netflix from Robert Downey Jr.), the *Essex County Trilogy*, *The Underwater Welder*, *Trillium* and *Roughneck*, as well as *Descender* and *Ascender* with Dustin Nguyen and *Black Hammer* with Dean Ormston. Jeff has also written *Green Arrow*, *Justice League* and *Animal Man* for DC Comics and *Hawkeye* for Marvel Comics. He's also part of the creative team on *Cosmic Detective*, which he recently Kickstarted with Matt Kindt and David Rubín.

In 2008 and in 2013 Jeff won the Shuster Award for Best Canadian Cartoonist. He has also received the Doug Wright Award for Best Emerging Talent and the American Library Association's prestigious Alex Award, recognizing books for adults with specific teen appeal. He has also been nominated for 8 Eisner awards, 7 Harvey Awards and 8 Shuster Awards. In 2010 *Essex County* was named as one of the five Essential Canadian Novels of the Decade. He currently lives and works in Toronto with his wife and son.

DUSTIN NGUYEN

is a *New York Times* Bestselling and multiple Eisner Award-winning comic creator, best known for his work on the creator-owned series *Descender* and his various iterations of *Batman* for the past 20 years.

Included in his body of work are creations for DC, Marvel, Image, Darkhorse, BOOM! Studios, IDW, Mattel, Konami, AMC Networks, Cartoon Network, and many more.

STEVE WANDS

is best known as a Harvey Award-nominated and Lammy Award-winning comic book Letterer with DC Comics, Image, TKO Studios, Dark Horse and others. When not working, he spends time with his family in New Jersey.

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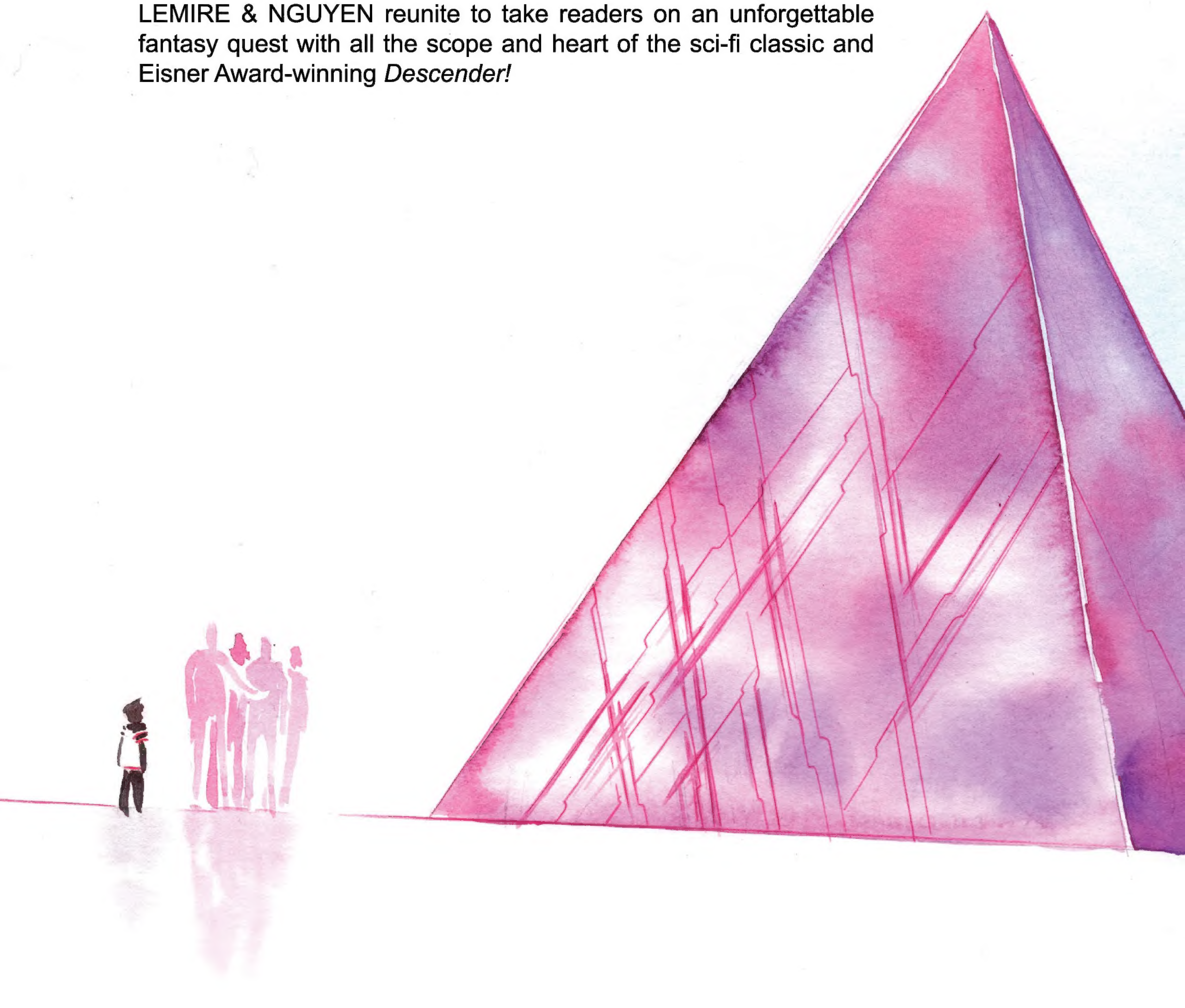

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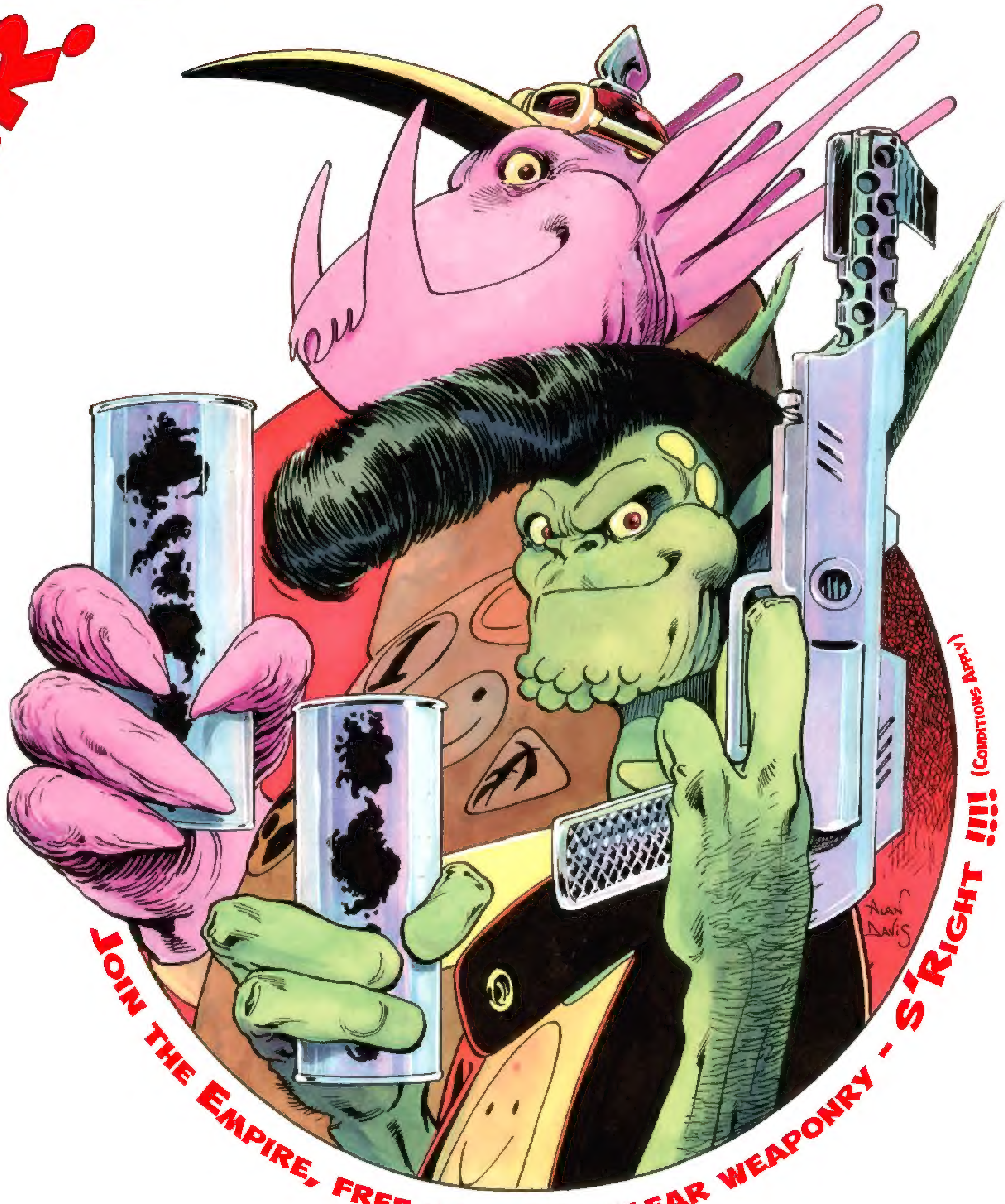
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